REPORT

#4

Peter Noever
Koplon/Krueger
Jon von Bergen
Lois Nesbitt
Mortin Price
Andreo Blum
Lucio Pozzi
Bernadette Fox
Dennis Dollens
Don Hoffman
Alostair Gordon
Azby Brown
Riko Sakumo
Grohom Shone
Frederiecke Toylor

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In 1970, the Viennese designer Peter Noever
started a project
on a site comprising
a 200-year-old
wine cellar and a quarry.
In the following description,
he sketches the progress of this project
over the
last two decades. The **Wine Cellar** is 30 meters long
and 5 meters wide. It is made of sandstone

We gained an additional room by constructing a dividing wall. The new room,

Inside, we whitewashed the sand-

by Peter Noever

the P

WINE CELLAR, THE PIT,
QUARRY CORRIDOR, WING-STAIR ELEMENTS,
QUARRY-STAIR CONSTRUCTION,
and TOILET
WITH CONCRETE PLATEAU

WING-STAIR ELEMENTS

Entry to
WINE CELLAR, with walled-in tables
and benches
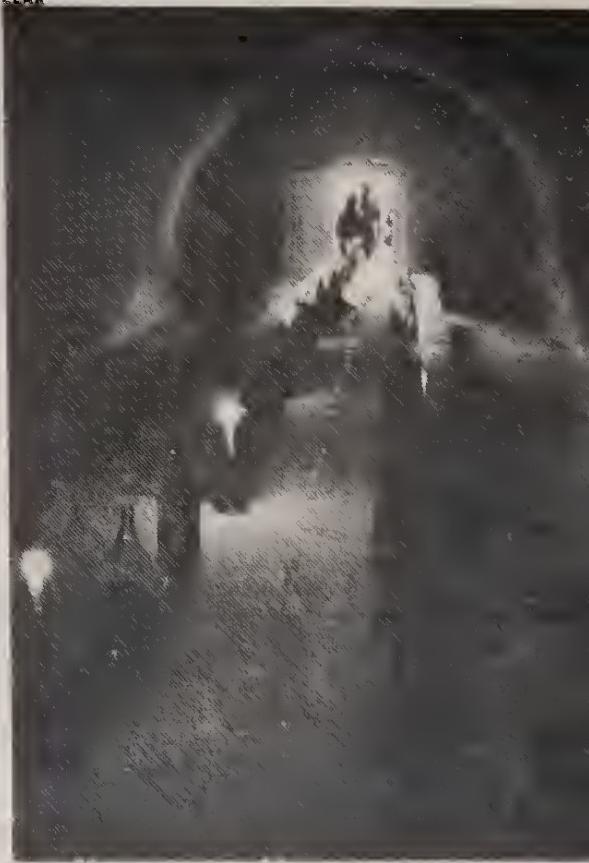
from the quarry on the site and covered by a grass roof.
facing **The Pit**, offers protection from heat and rain.
stone benches and tables to match the vaulted

IT

ceiling and the brick floor. A new entrance
door, made of solid cherry wood, was
installed in 1982.

In order to enable access from the pit to the
quarry, we built a 65-meter-long and 3.5-meter-high
Quarry Corridor (STEINBRUCH GANG) on the axis of the wine cellar. Viewed from the side, the
overgrown embankments of pit and corridor continue the line of the cellar's
grass roof. Despite its material contrast, The Pit construction thus fits into the landscape.

The corridor, enclosed by 40-meter-thick whitewashed concrete
walls, ends in the **Quarry-Stair Construction** (STEINBRUCH-STIEGENANLAGE), which leads into
the open quarry grounds 15 meters below. Approximately 15
meters before the end of the Quarry Corridor, we constructed **Wing-Stair Elements**
(FLUEGEL-TREPPEN ELEMENTE). These wing stairs provide access to the open
air, as well to the **Toilet with Concrete Plateau** (KLOSETT MIT BETON-PLATEAU), the **Wood Plateau**

QUARRY CORRIDOR with (HOLZ-PLATEAU)
WING-STAIR ELEMENTS
and the 36 **Concrete Rocks**
(BETON-STEINE).

The **Toilet with Concrete Plateau**
is the first of a
series of planned independent constructions.
The toilet is built into the slope parallel to The Pit
site and can be reached only via one of the wing stairs. It is
made of concrete and left unpainted.

TOILETS WITH CONCRETE PLATEAU

The second construction,
the **House Fragment** (HAUS FRAGMENT), was originally planned in
1985, but never materialized. The project was
to consist of three parallel brick walls of some 25 meters long
and 7 meters high, and plastered, whitewashed brick columns. In its place, we
installed 36 **Concrete Rocks**
(BETON-STEINE), each weighing 3.5 tons.

TOILET WITH
CONCRETE PLATEAU

The third project is the
Wood Plateau (HOLZ-PLATEAU),
a massive foot bridge-like timber construction, which lies
approximately 0.5 meters above ground level.
The plateau, which is accessible by wooden steps, offers a
view of both the toilet site and the 36 Concrete Rocks.

The next project to be realized
is **The Tower** (DER TURM). Located on a hill on the
side of the quarry, with its sides directing exactly to the
four cardinal points, The Tower will serve to
break the symmetry of the site.
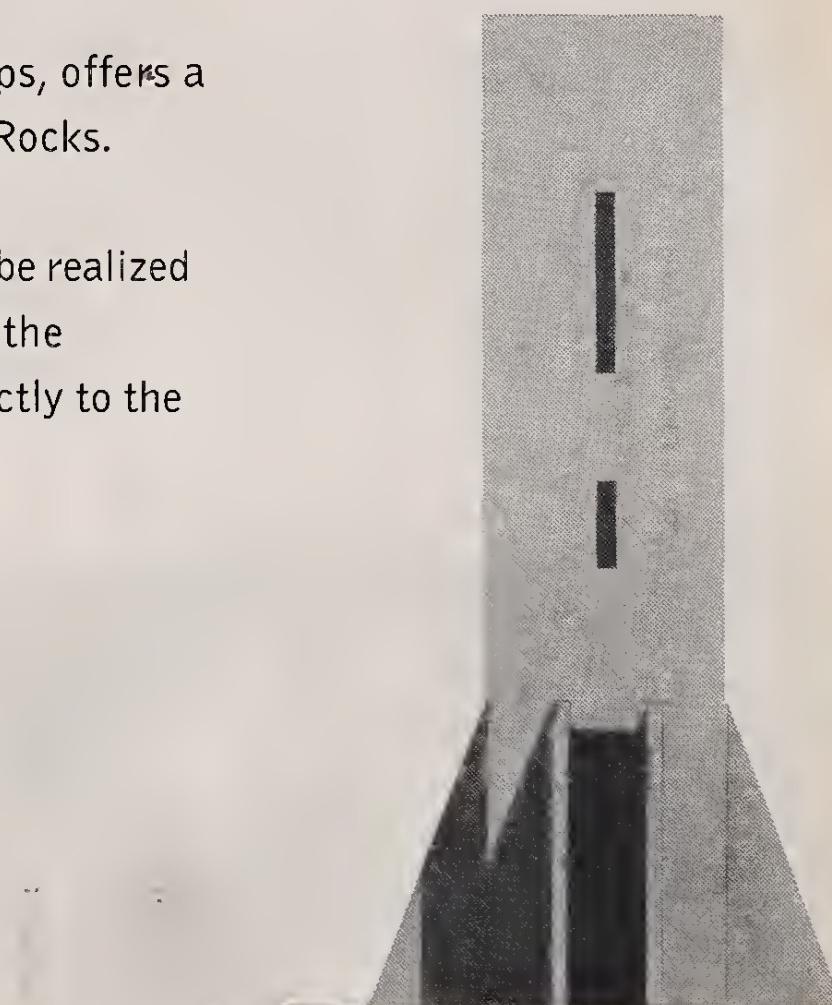
drawings of an elevation of
THE TOWER   Süd

Peter Noever is the director of the Austrian Museum for Applied Arts (MAK) in Vienna. Since 1975, he has taught Design at the Viennese Academy of Fine Arts. He is the editor of the architectural magazine UMRISS and regularly publishes articles on art, design, and architecture in domestic and foreign newspapers and magazines.

West   Nord   Ost

artificial PERSONALITY

by Ken Kaplan and Ted Krueger

BUILDINGS WITH MOTIVES

Intelligence is not an innate property of architecture. In current lon-guage, the term "intelligent" architecture denotes mechanical ability rather than autonomous cognitive behavior. The level of sophistication attained is minimal. Efficient but dumb sliding doors and robotic win-dow-washers promote both the limp passivity of people and the doltish subservience of architecture. Lighting circuits on motion detectors turn out the toilet lights before you reach the editorial page of the morning paper. Is this energy efficiency or productivity enhancement? Networking a few thermostats in a high-rise may be intelligent mechani-cal design but it does not substantially increase the IQ of the building itself. The building industry, whose narrow preoccupations are not unlike those of first experimental psychologists, is blindly obsessed with the manipulation of rudimentary functions of architectural behavior, instead of developing a full under-standing of the architectural potential of which intelligence is a part.

K/K Research and Development asserts that current architecture is a repressed clinical specimen concealing a complex array of latent behavioral features. Once released, these features will rock architecture and individuals out of their mutual subordination. In an effort to investigate this phenomenon, we have fabricated a new and proprietary branch of behavioral science: Artificial Personality©.

The first prototype to emerge from this investigation is a structure commissioned by ArtPork in Lewiston, New York. The structure's rudimentary intelligence consisted of a stimulus-response mode of operation: infrared motion detectors sensed the presence and location of viewers in the vicinity of the object, and triggered one of sixteen pro-grammed sequences of activity stored in its memory. In order to refine this process, we manipulated the timing and sequences of activity to convey a number of psychological states: arousal, defensiveness, aggression, paranoia, boredom, and confusion (confusion was the easiest).

The work was suspended between two cliffs created by the demolition of a tunnel serv-ing a defunct rail line which ran along the gorge of the Niagara River in New York State. A trail now occupies the old right-of-way, leaving only two paths to reach the suspended work. We directed motion detectors to register both the movement of approaching people and the move-ment directly below. When approached, the on-board computer activated one or all of fifteen automotive power antennae, three fog lamps, and a number of truck running lights positioned within the work. Programmed responses were provided for the firing of a single sensor and for all combinations. Since the object was directional, it responded differently to movement from ahead, from behind, from the two directions simultaneously, and from below. Loops in the pro-grams read the sensors intermittently in order to detect changes in position. When people watched passively, the work acclimated to their presence and went dormant, reviving when new movement occurred. When, on the other hand, a group of people engaged in continuous movement, such as milling about below, all sensors remained activated, responding agitatedly.

This choreography creates the impression that one is being watched with trepidation. The object's various responses to a person's changing movement manifest its attitude towards him and seems to constitute a comment as well.
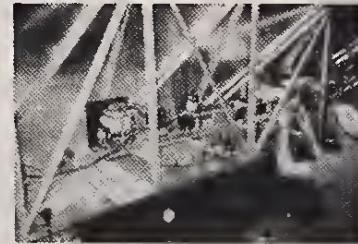
K/K Research and Development con-structed this project at ArtPark between June 12 and July 6, 1990. The project consists of a 28-foot warped triangular space frame of aluminum stock, with welded and mechanically fastened nodes. It is sheathed in grey acrylic and break-formed aluminum sheet bedded in silicon and screwed to the frame. Three main support cables pass through steel pipes incorporated into the frame to anchor points at the top of the cliffs. In addition, seven smaller cables, running to concrete-filled drums buried in the rock rubble below, serve to stabilize the work in the high winds of the area and to position it at the proper angle of dangle. Three DC power supplies convert standard electric service to the approximately half kilowatt of low-voltage power needed to drive the computer, the associated electronics, and the 12VDC automotive equipment.

future strip

by Jan van Bergen
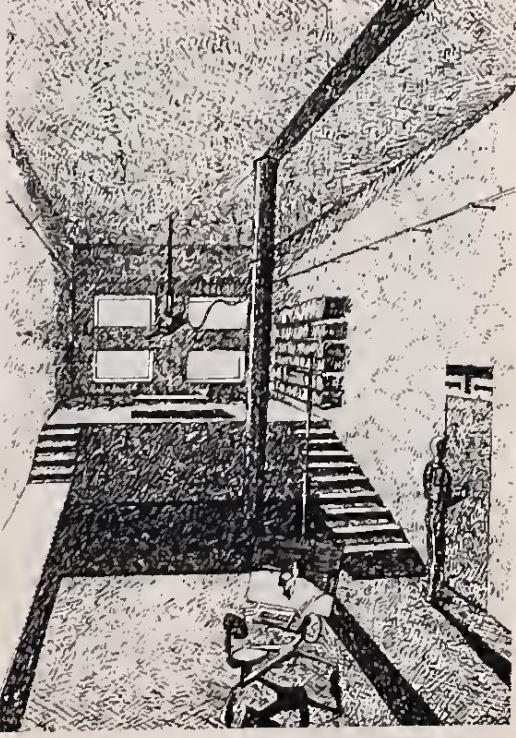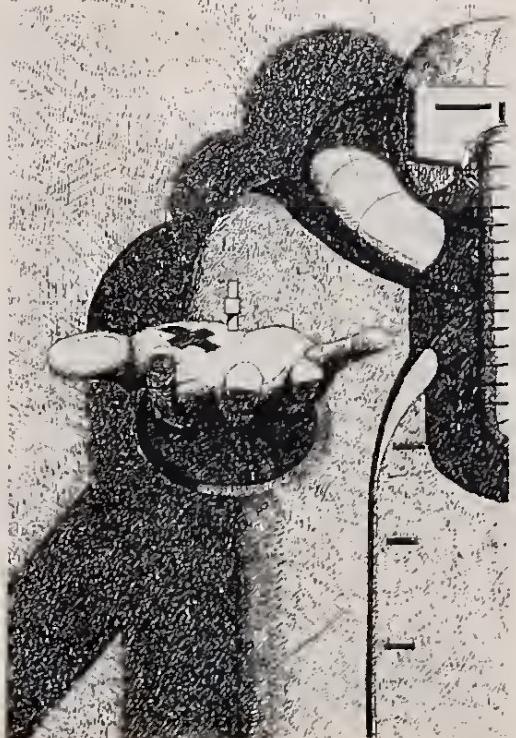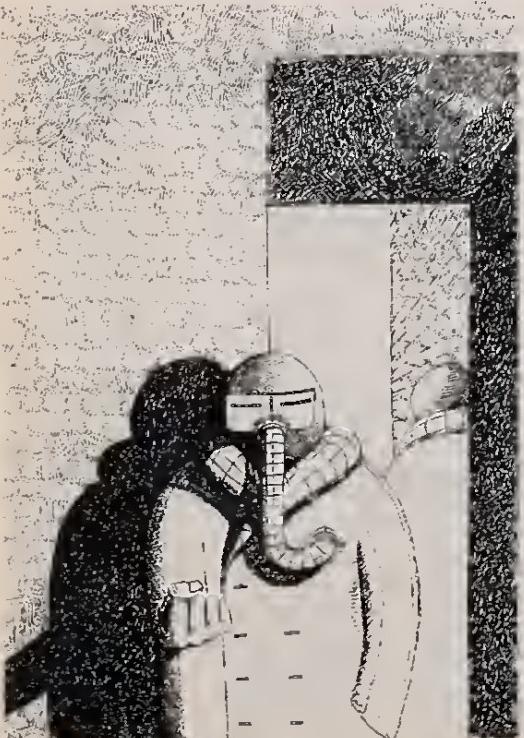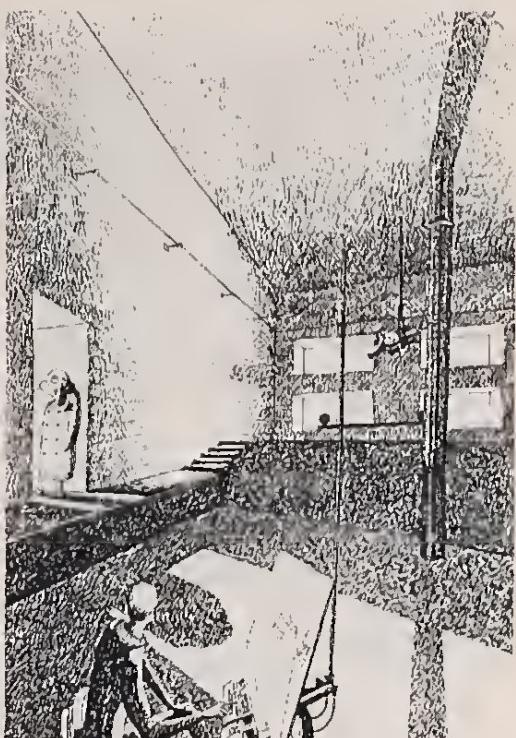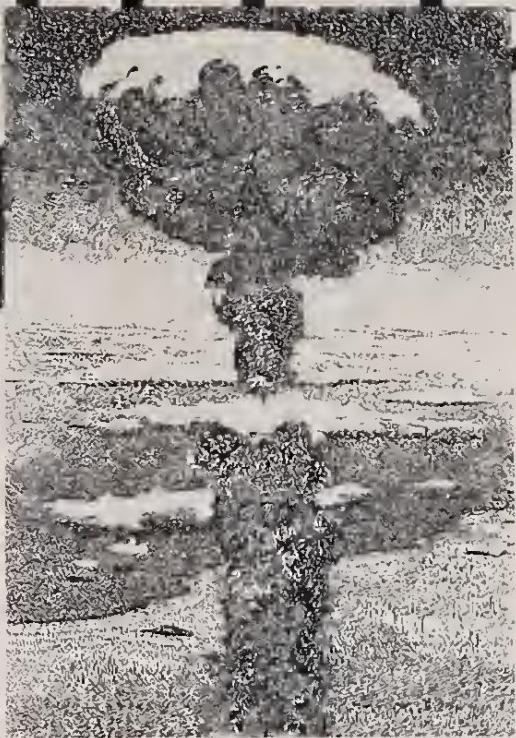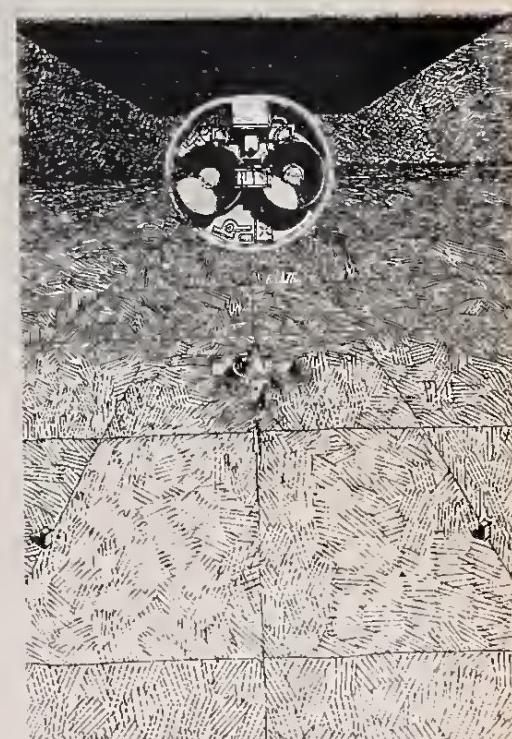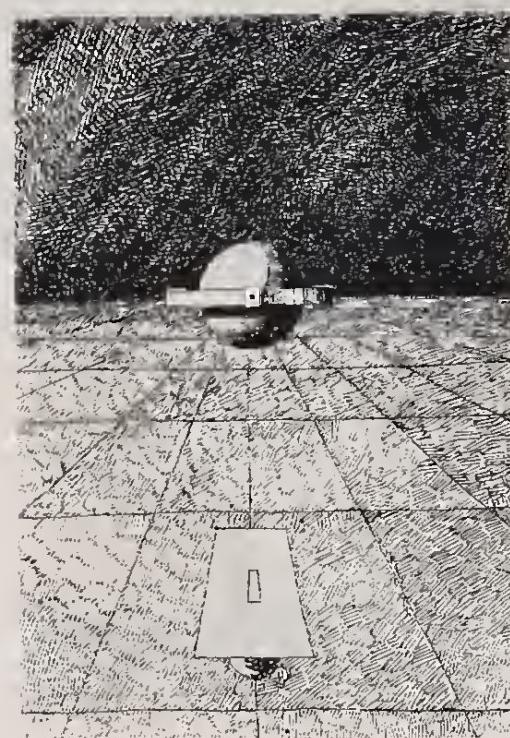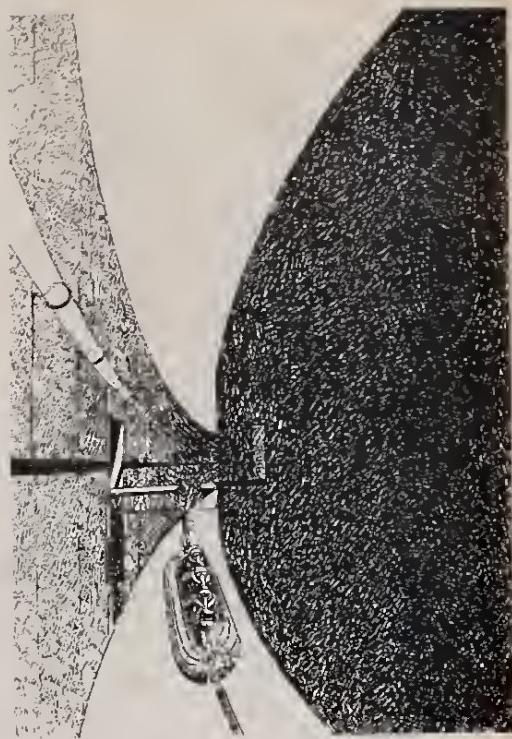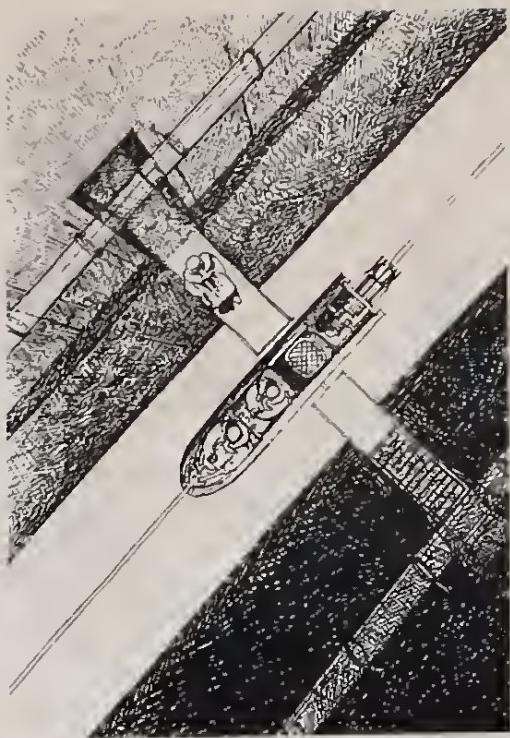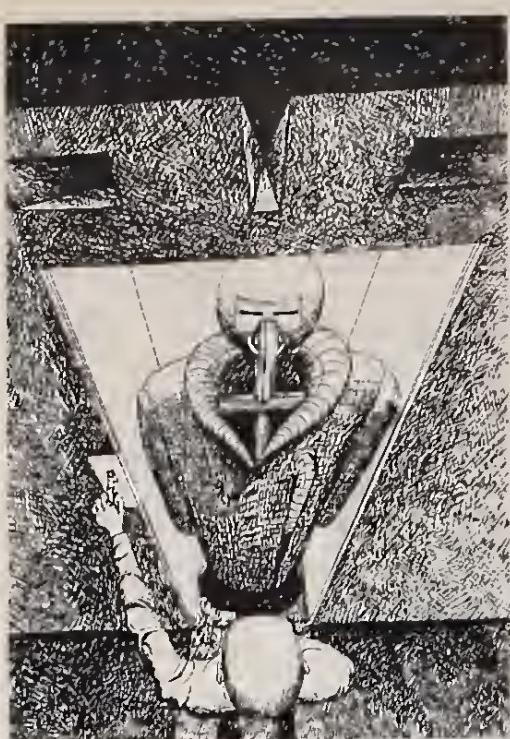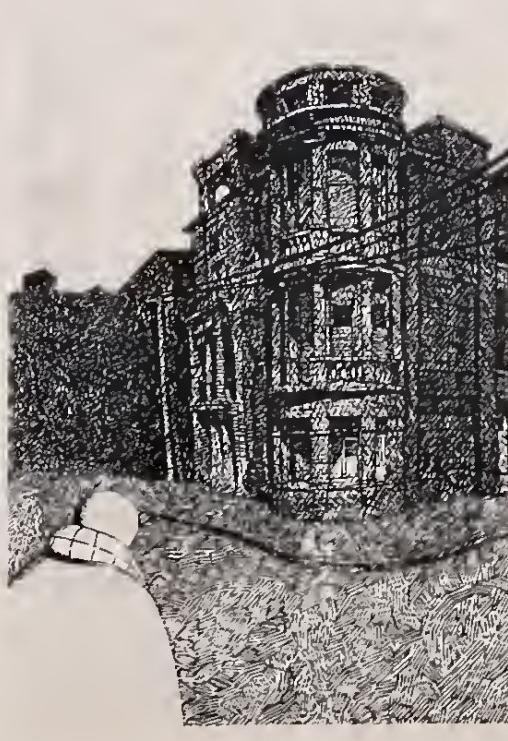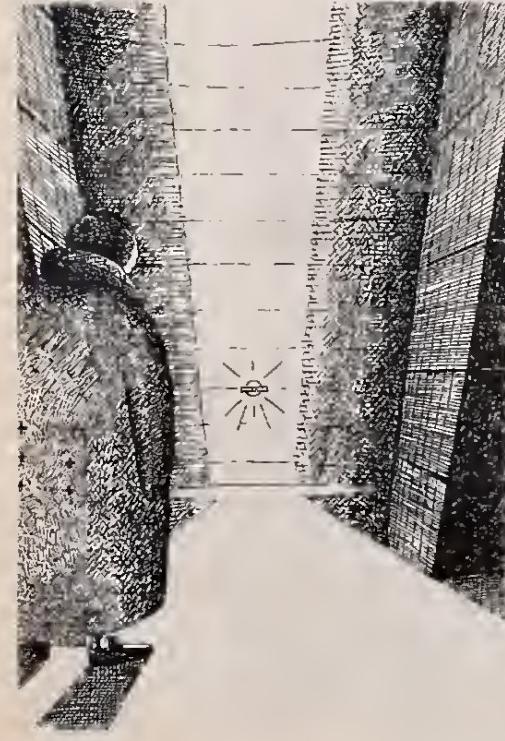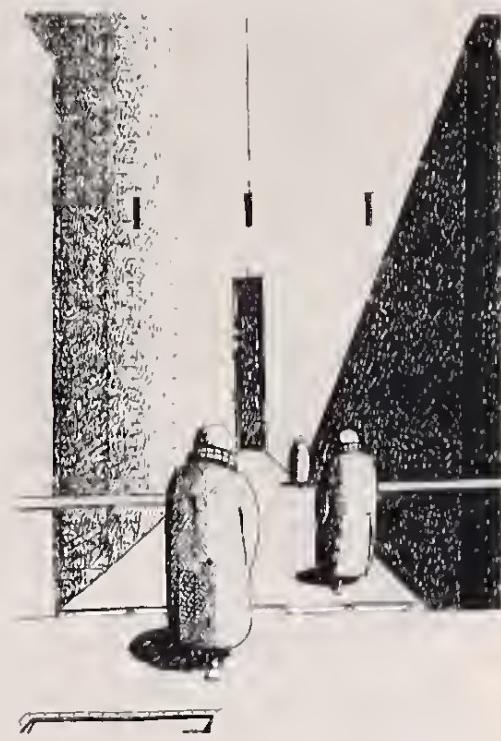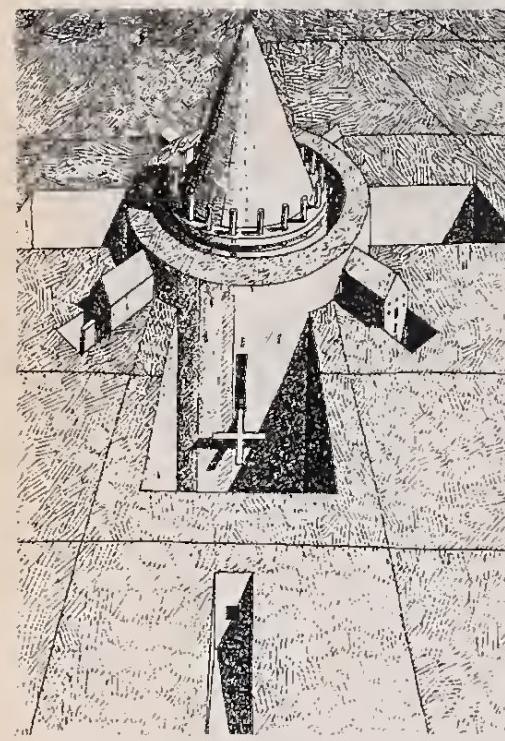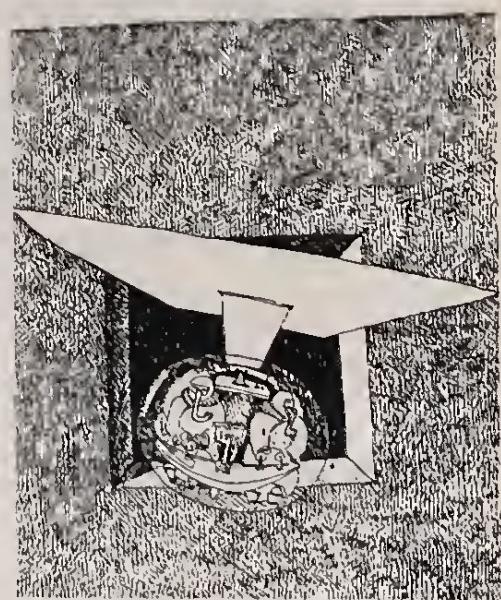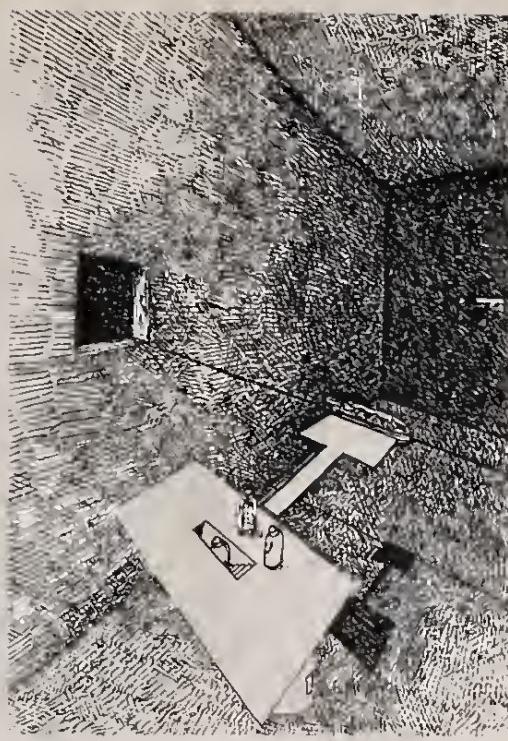
I was born in Pretoria, South Africa. After getting a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Pretoria (1987), I began to travel on the Indian subcontinent. Having bummed around for nine months there, I began to think that it would be a privilege to have a job and earn some money. So I left for Hong Kong and found a work at Hackett and Griffiths for seven months, only to learn that having a job and money it not a privilege but a form of slavery. With two months more of traveling, this time in China, I found myself in a vicious circle, going nowhere. So I set off to find a job again. This time I worked for S.O.M. in London, and this lasted a grueling year. I got fed up and left for Slovenia (ex-Yugoslavia), where I started these drawings. But after six months I was broke again. Off I went to Amsterdam to work as a computer draughtsman at a large engineering company. Now with a year of soul-killing work, I have once again saved enough money to afford the luxury to be with my own desires and instincts. I am back in Slovenia to draw more images for this strip.

homeless (CLOTHES)
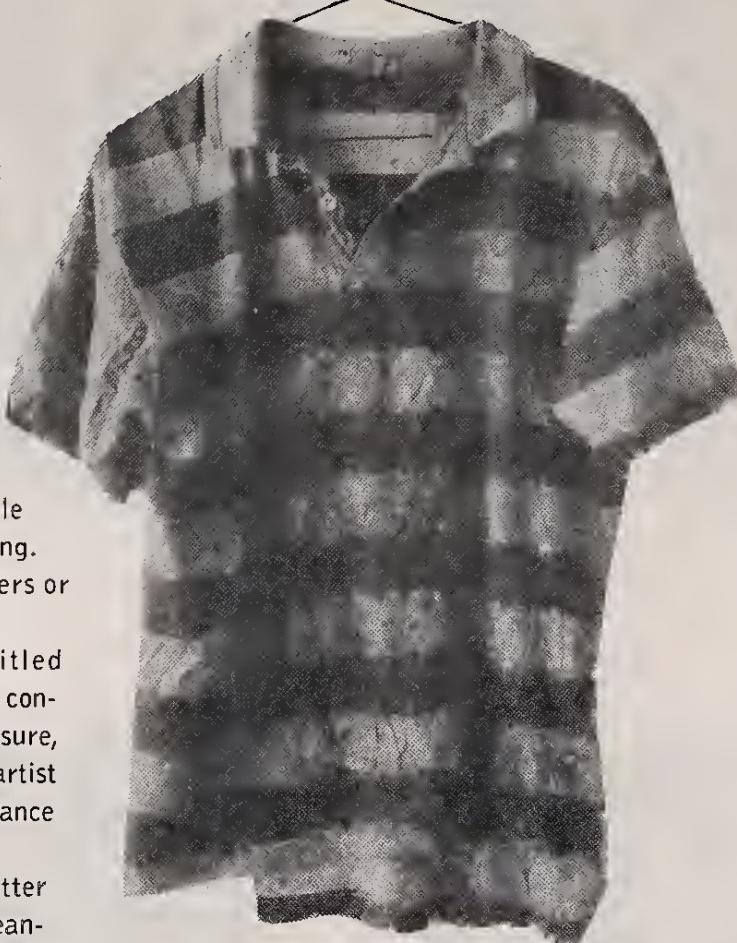
Last fall, while I was collecting debris from the streets of New York for an installation modeled on the city's now ubiquitous makeshift homeless shelters, I noticed a large amount of abandoned clothing lying around on the sidewalks and streets, cast off with moving-day trash piles or tossed into garbage cans. This wealth of usable, wearable apparel had ended up in the wrong place (exposed to the elements, it would deteriorate quickly; unless spotted by some resourceful individual, it was bound for landfill or incineration) for the wrong reasons: Our society manufactures clothing so efficiently and cheaply that it is "disposable;" people replace clothing the minute it goes out of style or needs minor mending. And they clearly don't find it worth their time to send it off to shelters or charitable organizations for reuse.

I have been working for some time on a series of works entitled *Home/homesick/homeless*. These works explore the literal and symbolic constructs of home and homelessness—metaphors for protection and exposure, security and vulnerability, social identity and invisibility. I consider the artist as "homeless" too. The artist is a self-designated outsider whose resistance to social positioning enables him or her to question the social structure.

I also see the artist as a "recycler," who transforms obsolete matter (physical and conceptual) into something that bears contemporary meaning. Accordingly, a second series of works deals with recycling, both as an ecological necessity and as a cultural phenomenon.

by Lois Nesbitt

While I was constructing the shelter installation, I became dissatisfied with the way my work treated social and political themes remote from my own experience. This uneasiness, and the discovery of the abandoned clothing, inspired me to design a month-long project entitled *Homeless (clothes)*: **During the month of January 1992, I would only wear clothes which I found on the streets of New York.**

I began collecting clothes during December. Following my usual routes through lower Manhattan, I quickly found more than enough to wear. I found men's, women's, and children's clothing—pants, skirts, shirts, T-shirts, mittens, scarves, and socks. At the last minute I found a parka which would protect me from the bitterly cold January weather. I washed everything, but otherwise left it in the condition in which I had found it.

I announced the project via a postcard mailing the last week of December.

While the project was designed to involve me more directly in my work, I had not anticipated how vulnerable I would feel — to the weather, but also to the inquisitive, disdainful, and judgmental looks of people who didn't know that this was an art project, to the scrutiny of stylish SoHo types, well-dressed uptowners, current and potential employers (I had one job interview during the month); and to the spandex-clad beauties at my health club. I was also exposed to comments and criticisms from those who did know what I was up to. The director of a prominent nonprofit museum in New York sent a postcard inscribed with a one-word comment: "Ick." Several friends called to donate their old clothes (which I had to refuse).

Throughout the month, people treated me like a piece of art, voicing their opinions as if I were a painting or a sculpture in a gallery. This "objectification," though alienating, was mitigated by the fact that I could, unlike the absent creator of a painting or sculpture, directly respond to their remarks and explain my intentions. People offered opinions on homelessness, its causes and victims, their feelings of guilt or disgust or impatience or detachment, their personal encounters with homeless people, and their skepticism about government action on the issue. Someone accused me of depriving real homeless people of available clothing (I planned, as part of my concern with recycling, to send the clothes to a shelter at the end of the project); others feared that I was turning homelessness into a fashion statement.

Most questions, however, concerned hygiene: Had I washed the clothes? Was I wearing my own underwear? These queries suggest a widespread, if vague, fear of disease, of contamination, of infection by some ominous, unspecified Other. They also indicate the poorly concealed "classism" (fear of other economic classes, particularly the "disenfranchised" or "underclass") that, like racism and more generic forms of xenophobia, lies behind labels such as "the homeless." We have a need to isolate undesirable elements in our society, to target and thus objectify "The Problem." For me, the strength of *Homeless (clothes)* lay in the scrambling or transgression of categories like "us" and "them," the housed and the homeless. People looked at me, a young, healthy white girl in those motley, ill-fitting, mismatched, often ragged clothes, and were perplexed: Someone like me should not be "homeless." Meanwhile, I encountered plenty of young, healthy white, black, and Hispanic women; people with AIDS, runaway teens, mothers with babies, blind men, alcoholics, junkies, psychotics — all of whom were homeless. The fact that all these people are without housing clearly indicates that there is something wrong at the core of our social system.

Homeless (clothes) was not meant as a political statement. I did not mean to portray the homeless as victims or renegade heroes. Instead, I attempted to seize a potent image, make it live through me, my actions, and my conversations with others, and take in and respond to the surprisingly conflicting sentiments it engendered. The discomfort and ambivalence, the strident declarations and defensiveness stirred by the project signaled dissent and disagreement on the issue of homelessness. If we are able to bring these conflicting voices together in an articulate debate, we will advance one step toward a reasoned confrontation of a crisis that dramatically reveals the fissures and faults in the social monolith.

FOR Ground scrapers

Spaces that permit natural light to enter can be smaller in scale between horizontal forms than between vertical forms. These spaces can be of a more human scale and are therefore more comfortable and more inhabitable. Communication between people can occur more easily horizontally, even if stretched over quite a long distance. And, quite literally, a low-rise would be more livable, because there would be less chance to be trapped in a fire in a low-rise than in a high-rise "towering inferno."

Two sites in California—one in San Diego and one in La Jolla—were chosen to express and show the way for the "groundscrapers." Both sites contain enough space and unique conditions to beg for the more humane approach. However, when our efforts were started, an obelisk-shaped tower of 34 floors was under construction in San Diego, and a complex of austere buildings of heights to 16 floors had been built in La Jolla.

The hard-edged site in San Diego is bounded by a rectangular grid pattern of streets and is bisected by a curved trolley-line street. It is not far from the ocean, and is surrounded on three sides by relatively low-height development, including the Santa Fe Railway station. The soft-edged site in La Jolla is among gentle rolling hills and valleys. It is adjacent to an intersection of a north-south interstate highway and a local east-west roadway. The site in San Diego was to contain 561,600 square feet of rental

office space, 23,050 square feet of retail space, and a 270-room hotel. The site in La Jolla was to contain 212,000 square feet of rental office space, a health club, restaurants, and a 400-room hotel.

The solution in each site is based upon initially establishing an envelope of form that addresses the basic and unique conditions of the site. In San Diego, the pattern of abutting streets was to define the edges of built form. In La Jolla, the rhythms of flowing land form were to inspire the flow of built form. The need to address circulation paths with clear directions of movement to spaces of logical dimensions resulted in the establishment of building widths of about 50 to 60 feet. This provided not only a reasonable dimension for rental office space, but also a dimension that considered the penetrating ability of natural light. Clear arrival entries both by foot and by automobile were mandated. Vertical circulation was encouraged to be clearly expressed visually as well as experienced dramatically, and was not to be buried inside of the form.

In San Diego, the challenge to respect the profile of surrounding buildings as well as acknowledge the ocean view in San Diego, established an initial envelope of form. A rotated tilt to the plane of this envelope provided a view of the ocean to the south and to the west. Then, through the act of subtraction that considers logical dimensions of elements and spaces in between, rhythms and patterns of form emerged. The placement of hotel rooms on top of office spaces was mandated not only to provide for better views but also to provide for privacy away from the street level. Commercial retail spaces were encouraged throughout the schemes at street level to bring a sense of activity and life to the pedestrian. Escalators throughout the complex were promoted as a more

comfortable means of circulating than elevators. Finally the use of color was encouraged to keep the spirit of the place especially in mind. This quality includes not only Southern California light and colorful foliage but also the colorful traditions of San Diego's close neighbor, Mexico.

The challenge to extend the profile of the rolling land into a growth of built form was achieved in La Jolla. Sometimes the profiles extended the hills, creating deeper valleys, and sometimes the profile lifted the valley into new hills. A rhythms of cross sections at 50 foot intervals through the site determined where the built contours would rise. A skin or wrapper was placed on these sections which connected them with a continuous surface. This envelope of form left open ends where extruding, brightly colored circulation paths could be expressed and highlighted. The surface of the wrapper was then articulated with openings to express a reaching for light and view. A distinction in the pattern was determined by the nature of the contained space. Reaching for distant views, contemplating local hills, or meditating in quiet spaces determined the placement of hotel rooms on top of office spaces or in separate wings flanking courtyards.

An alternative to sky scraping is scraping the ground.
A "Groundscraper" is a dense horizontal packaging of space which organically anchors to the ground. This horizontal composition of forms creates a more comfortable feeling by naturally connecting to the land instead of unnaturally invading the sky with overbearing vertical forms.

by Martin Price

Roof Plan

Ground floor volume plan

Typical floor circulation path
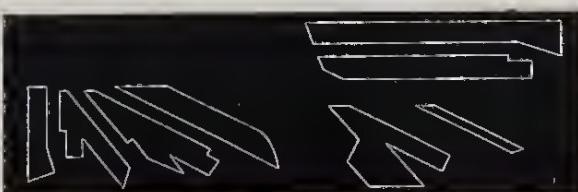
Ground floor commercial space plans
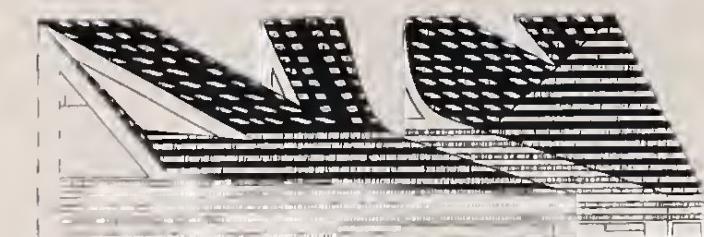
Elevation
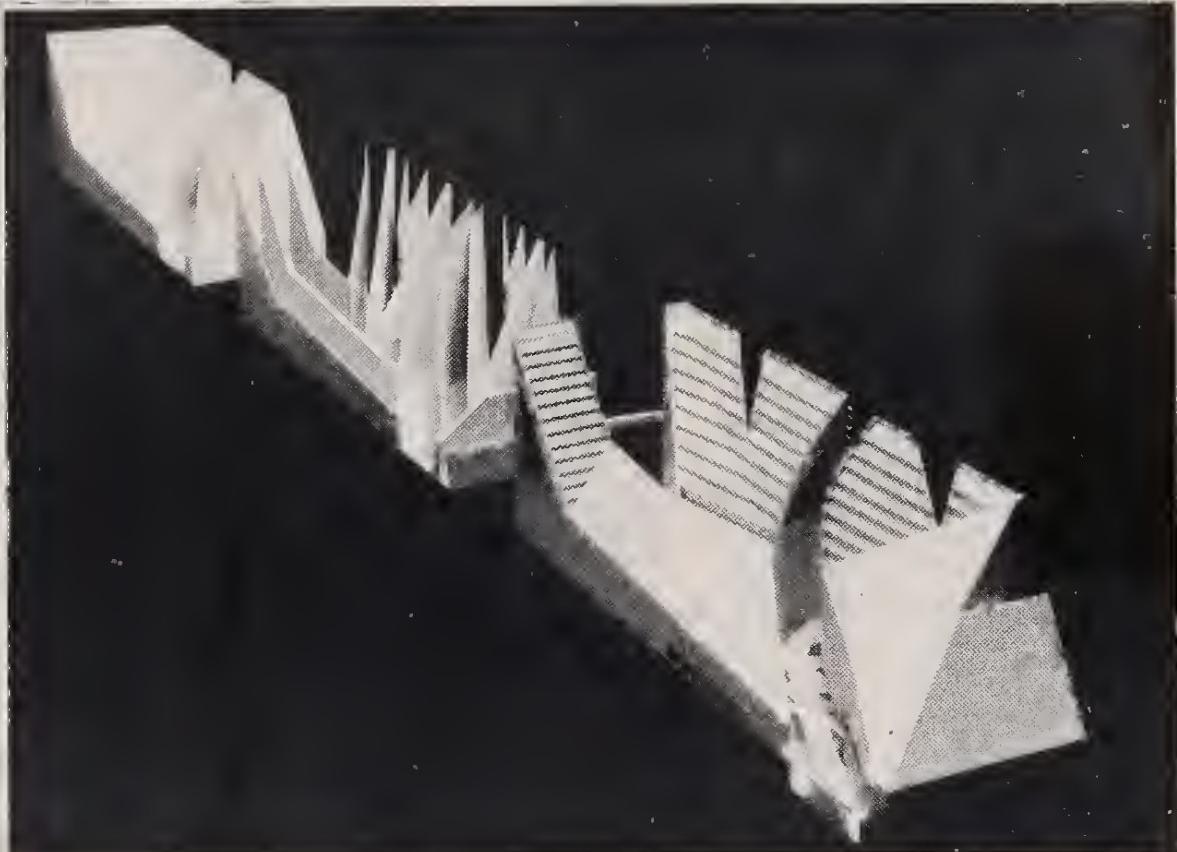
(left to right) Initial envelope of form, circulation path, final envelope of form models

FOR

SAN DIEGO

the first scheme

began with a folding of the basic plane
of form so that the north and east sides
are at the high points and the south and
west sides are at the low points. A series
of fingerlike elements extend from a
focal point of entry at the southwest
corner of the curved street and lead to
lobbies at the north and east edges.
Hotel sections are separated from the
office spaces below by triangular pro-
filed outdoor spaces which contain
swimming pools and restaurants and
are connected by bridges. with BRANDON BALLINGER

Roof plan

Ground floor volume plan
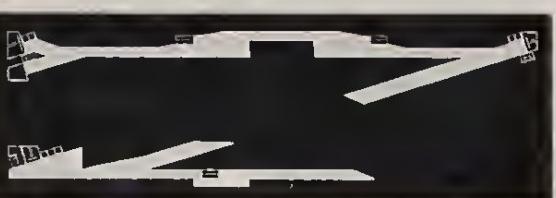
Ground floor circulation path
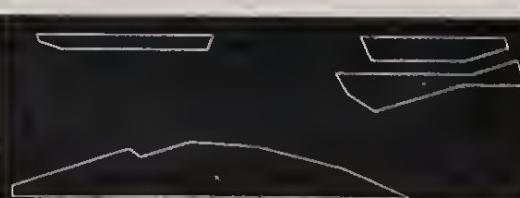
Ground floor office space plans
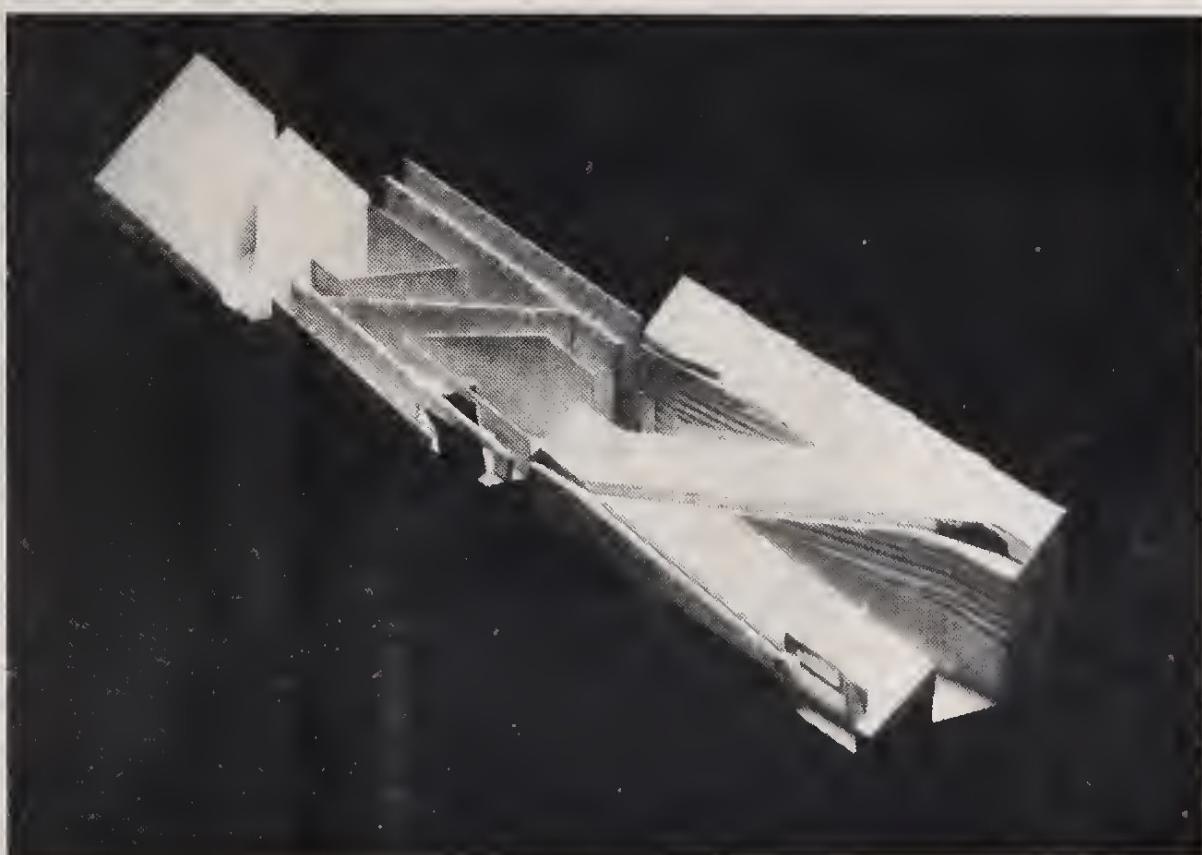
(left to right) Initial envelope of form, circulation path, final envelope of form models

the second scheme

developed from the desire to be able to walk up a building, as one walks up a hill. It is as if the ground extend up at an angle to reach each floor. One transverses in a climb and this becomes the angle of roof profiles. This not only dramatizes movement but also provides emergency exiting. The elements of form bridge the curved street to provide this continuous path. Within the scheme, escalator landings open to exterior terraces. As in all of the schemes, elevators and stairs occur dramatically at the exterior of the form but are girdled to the form for a better sense of protection and comfort. This results in facades of expressive patterns of motion. WITH LINDA FLORES AND HOA TRAN

Roof plan

Typical floor circulation path
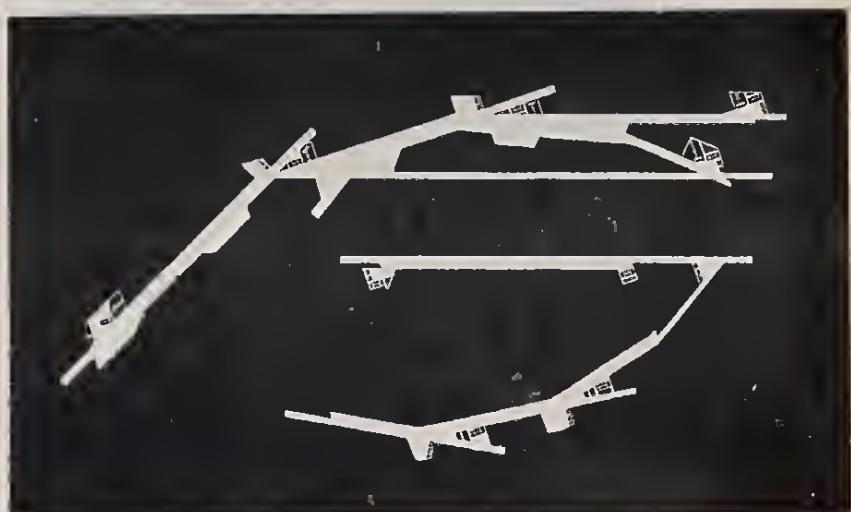
Envelope of form model
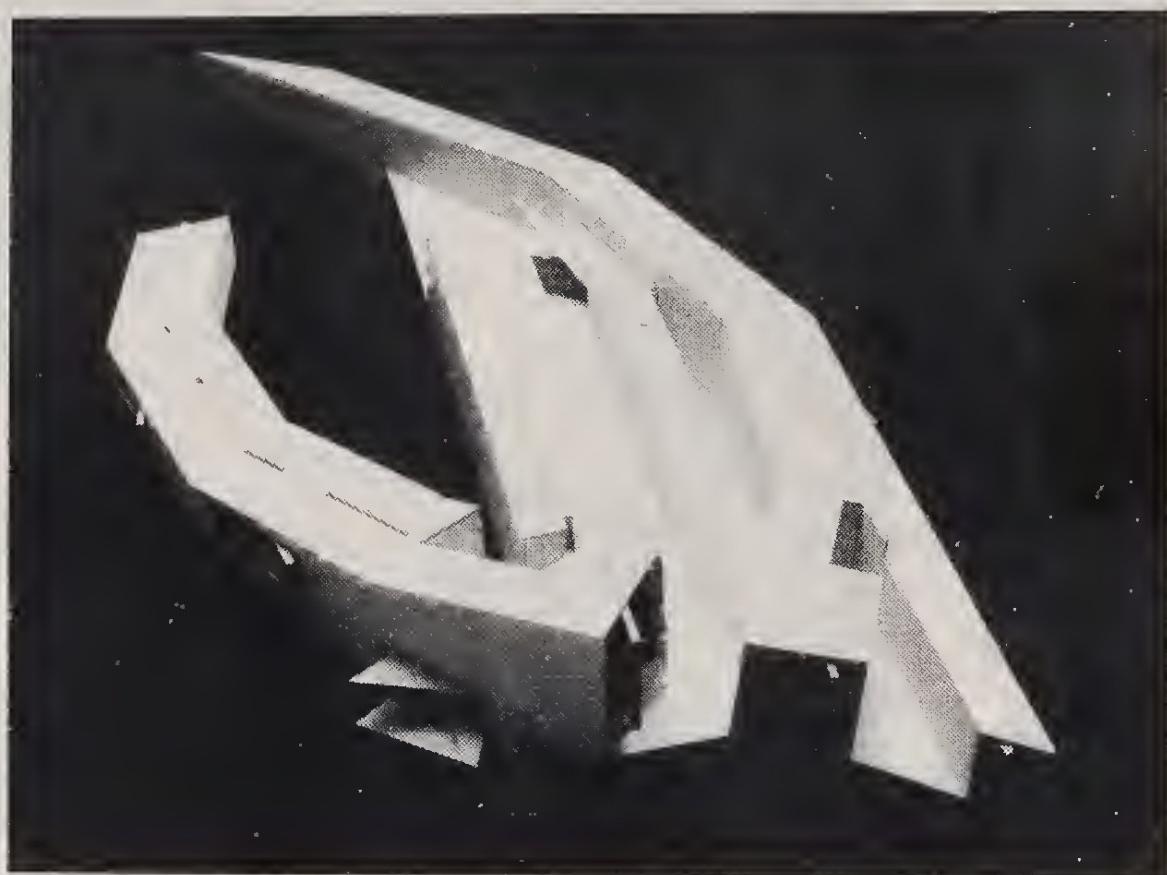
Land contour profile model

FOR

LA JOLLA

the first scheme

sited offices adjacent to the highway
and roadway in a continuous unfolding
arc-like form. This shape buffers the
visible elements and audible noises to
the adjacent hotel whose form bends
around to enclose an outdoor recre-
ational space. The meeting space in
between these two forms contains
restaurants, ballrooms, meeting rooms
and retail shops. The profiles of the
composition extend the rhythm of the
hills. The outdoor spaces in between
become the deeper valleys. WITH TRAVIS EDWARDS AND HOMER SAENZ
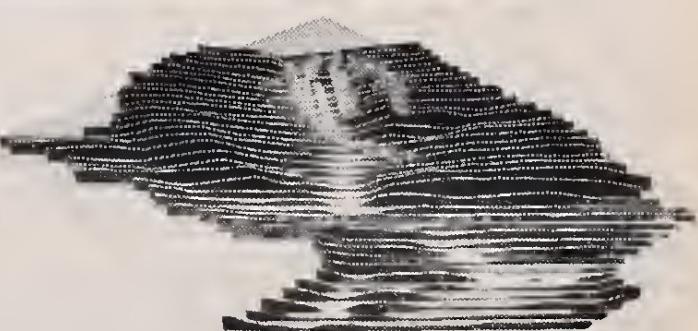
Roof plan
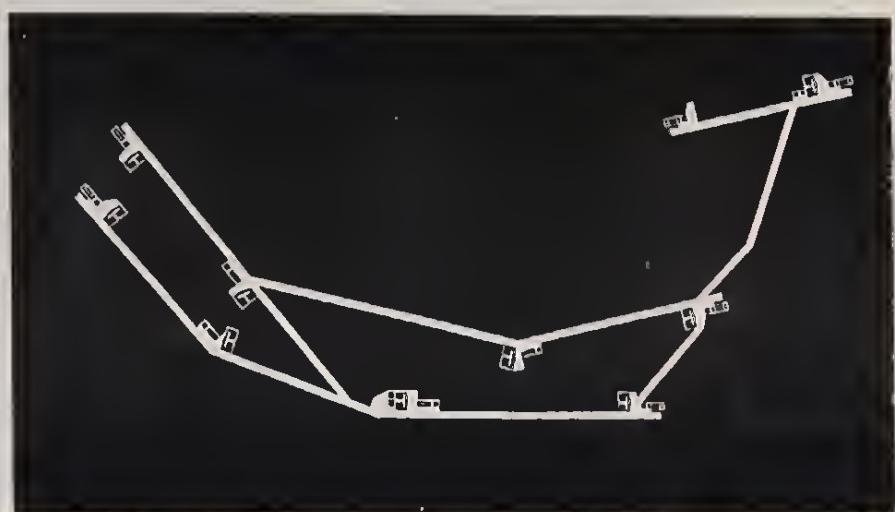
Typical floor circulation path

Envelope of form model

Land contour profile model

the second scheme

snakes around a hill, and because it is positioned in a valley, its profile creates a new hill. It does not rise above the existing landscape, and provides a view that focuses into the hills. As the form flows through the land, it separates to enclose a linear courtyard. Offices that flank both sides of an interior path have views that face outward or into the courtyard. Hotel rooms that are positioned to one side of a path are placed above the office spaces and their views therefore face outward and only toward the land. To further this connection windows are positioned low to view the land. Larger hotel spaces such as meeting rooms and ballrooms are placed under the office spaces, locating them adjacent to the main pedestrian and auto entrances. A wall that connects the ends of the offices and hotel to a restaurant and health club facility buffers the site from the adjacent highway.

WITH MELISSA BERNARD AND FARZANA RAHMAN

Martin Price is an architect and teaches at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Urban Love Seat/Bus Stop
1991

A curved modulated structure of undetermined length is placed on an urban street, establishing a row of seating for individuals waiting for a bus or just desiring to sit down. Each compartment is made of two-way mirror, translucent enough to see through, yet mirrored enough to be reflective.

The *Urban Love Seat* places the pedestrian in an intimate configuration in a public space. Separated by a reflective wall, one is confronted with ones own vanity and systems of defense.
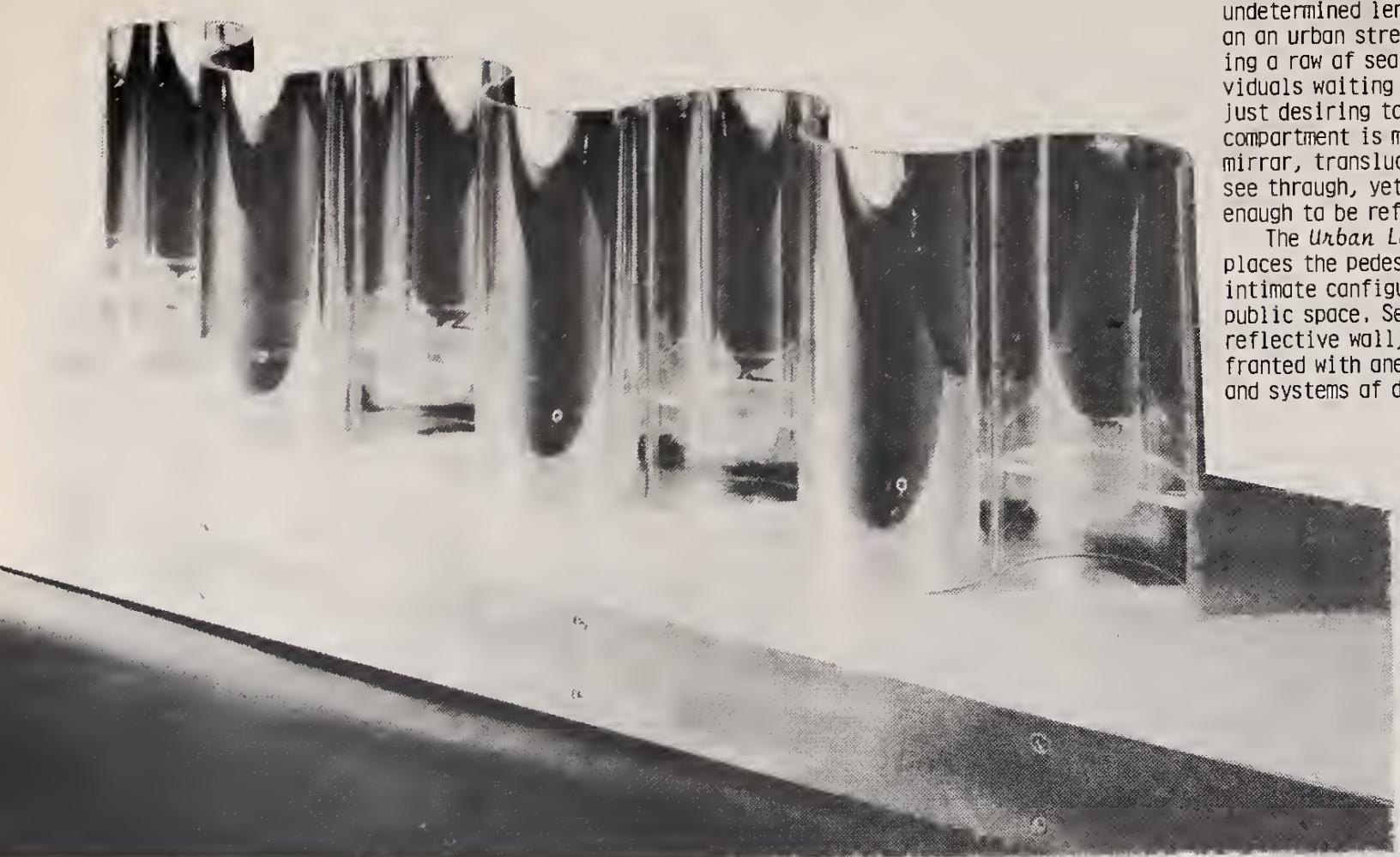
SUSPENDED MANHOLES

and other

by Andrea Blum
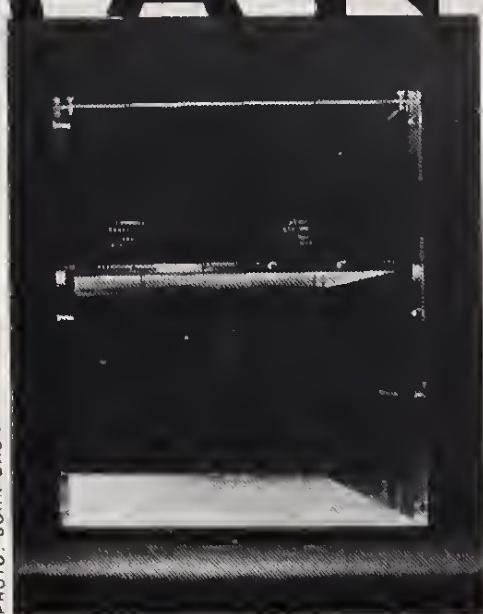
Suspended Manholes
1990

Several steel ladders with accompanying railing penetrate the surface of a suspended drop ceiling of opalescent Plexiglas. Above, the bright lights of the room illuminate the space piercing the false ceiling at each manhole opening. The room remains empty but for the access ladders hovering overhead.

The manhole penetrates the urban plateau of the street. It is an access route to the underground network system of the city. This system is operated by workers who descend into a zone of darkness from lightness, to privacy from public view. The manhole becomes a "peephole" as the descendent turns his or her gaze upward to the activity of the street. *Suspended Manhole* displaces the viewer/public into a non-space, a territory of emptiness with routes of access beyond one's reach.

Sunken Network System
FILLMORE CENTER, SAN FRANCISCO
1991

This project is part of a rede-
velopment program in San Fran-
cisco's Fillmore District. It
is designed to establish an
"outreach" to the neighborhood
while simultaneously addressing
the issues of urban growth,
ecological compromise, and dis-
plocement. The given was to
design an entrance plaza to a
mixed residential and commer-
cial, subsidized and non-subsi-
dized building complex.
    The plaza is inscribed with
two sets of access routes, one
being water troughs, the other
walkways. A third route is
marked by a number of
bench/slab structures which
designate private space within
the public space of access. The
plaza is laid out like a corta-
graphic system, notating
entrance and exit to and from
the surrounding neighborhood.
The project becomes a "life-
line," attempting to re-connect
the development complex to its
community.

projects

Carousel

Four benches make a pinwheel
formation. Attached to the
outer side of each structure is
a chrome-plated extension arm
with a vanity mirror held to
the bench with hardware. The
unit resembling a kind of
corset or harness.
    Carousel addresses the
relationship between voyeurism
and vanity. The context and
location of the piece further
informs its meaning. If placed
within a gallery, the col-
lectible becomes the object of
ones own vanity; if located on
the street, of paranoia and
surveillance.
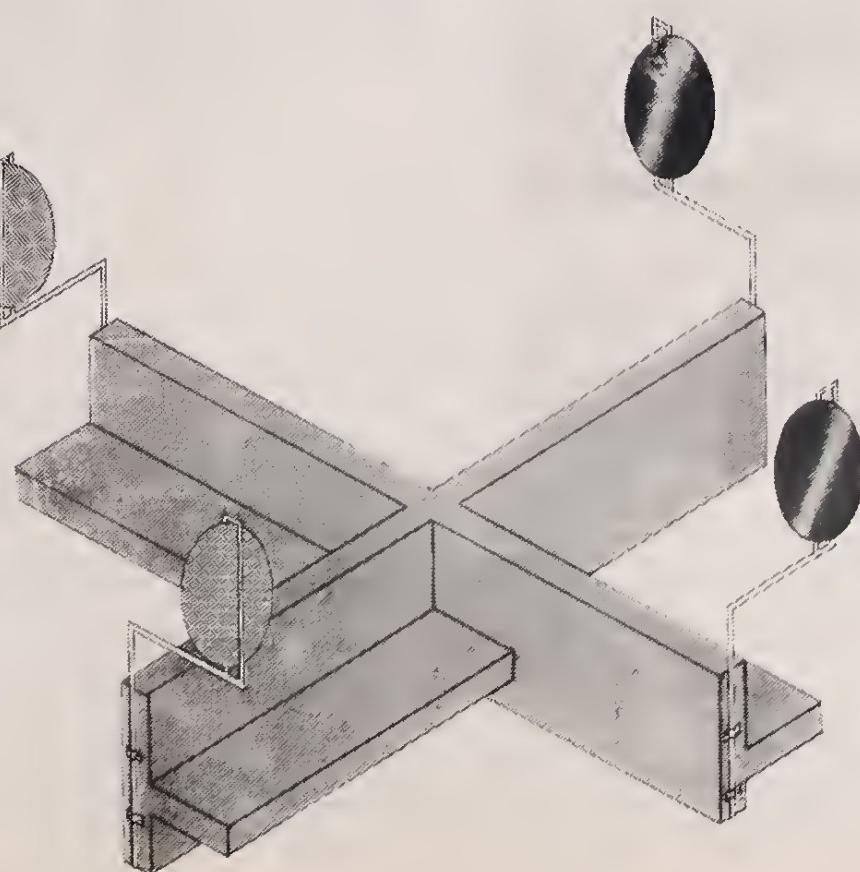
Building Penetration with Pedestrian Surveillance

Multiple beamlike structures penetrate the building plane, marking the entrance somewhat like a cinema marquee. They monitor the activity of the passerby, recording simultaneously the fragmentation of the body of the person inside and that of someone on the street. The dislocation of one's own image mixes with that of another. Both are being watched without the ability to control.

PHOTO. BILL ORCUTT
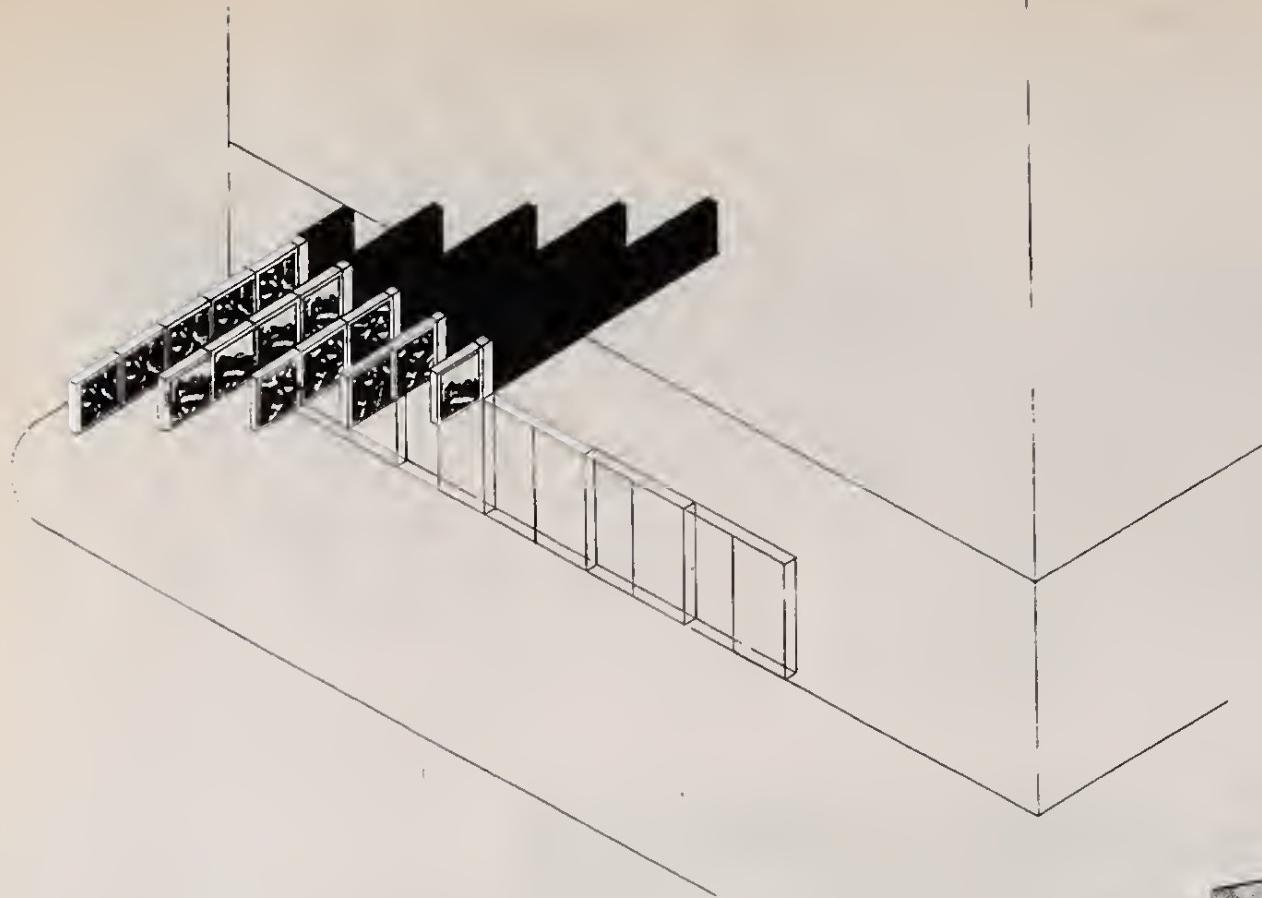
Escape Condition/ Conditioned Escape

Seven catwalks climb up the side of a building at 12-foot intervals. The building has no windows or access to the inside. Each catwalk has a ladder which drops to the level below. The structure continues downward, penetrating the sidewalk and the substructure of the street.

Escape Condition/Conditioned Escape uses the urban vernacular of access to notate a condition which has none. The non-ending structure implies its futility; the escape route becomes a referent, not a possibility.

Born in New York, Andrea Blum received a BFA from Tufts University (1973) and an MFA from the Art Institute of Chicago (1976). Her most recent projects are Surveillance Marquee for Galerie Des Archives in Paris, Surveillance Stations at STROOM: Center for Visual Arts in The Hague, Holland, Split Pavilion in Carlsbad, California, and Sunken Network System with Mirrored Arbor, at Fillmore Center in San Francisco. Her collaborative projects are 107th Street Pier with Cavaglieri and Sultan Architects, a project sponsored by New York city Percent for Art and Public Development Corporation (1991), and Landfill Bus Station, a project with Dennis Adams at The New Urban Landscape, Battery Park City, New York (1988).
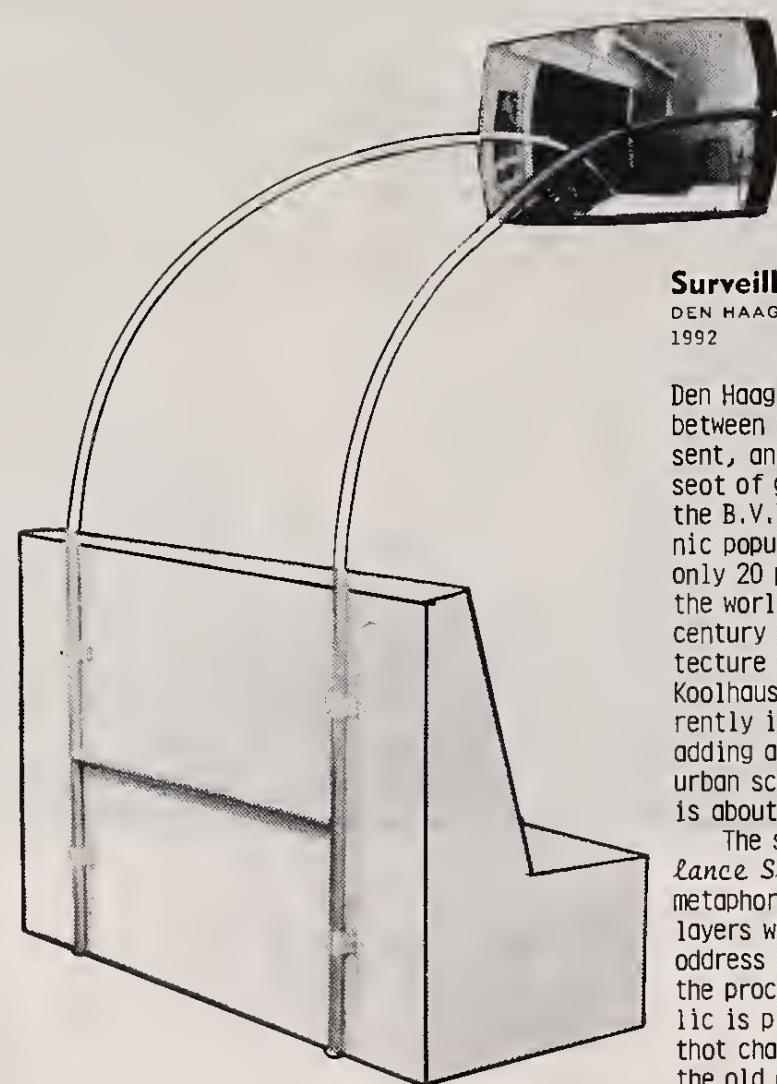
Surveillance Stations
DEN HAAG, HOLLAND
1992

Den Haag is caught somewhere between its layered past, present, and future. It is the seat of government; it houses the B.V.D.; it has a multi-ethnic population; it has one of only 20 panoramas remaining in the world; it brackets this century with the finest architecture from Oud to Berlage to Koolhaus and Rossi; and it currently is in the process of adding another layer to its urban scheme as the New Europe is about to be born.

The siting of five *Surveillance Stations* marks the metaphoric juncture of these layers while attempting to address the city as a city in the process of change. The public is placed as watchdogs to that change. It is seated facing the old city, while the new city is viewed in 180 degree panoramic distortion from behind, placed overhead, framing the view in front. A graphic image of the changing development of the city from the 14th century to the mid 20th century is mapped onto the back side of the suspended light box locating and illuminating the viewer/station.

The station is a love seat or vanity. When placed in the context of the city, it becomes a symbol of urban development, change, and displacement. The viewer/public is placed in the liquid state of watching and being watched, observers of history and of the present. Public amenity is convoluted with the psychological space of unease.

paperswim

by Lucio Pozzi

Paperswim originated in 1971. It's genesis lay in the simple analytical observation that we generally paint over the texture of a surface—from outside it, so to speak, and never from inside.

I found that newspapers throw away many yards of paper at the end of every newsprint roll because their rotary presses demand a continuous paper supply, and rolls must be changed before they run out. I proceeded to loosely crumple enormous amounts of this white paper, filling a room with an eight- to ten-foot-high sea of it. Acting as "The Painter" and assuming the name Sylo Varrese—an anagram of Rrose Selavy—I then don a black leotard covering my head as well as my body. A pair of blinders (like horse blinders) are attached to my head, to the left and right of my eyes. I dive in to the sea of paper, crawling around under it for eight hours and surfacing every couple of minutes to ritualistically trace a mysterious mark on a piece of crumpled paper. During this performance, the public stands at the shore of the paper sea. Somewhere in the room, a clock gauges my timing. In a corner, hidden under the paper, there is a supplies box containing a flashlight, an apple, nuts, water, an empty bottle in case of need, a few black magic markers, tissues, and a reminder of the marks I am to make, in their sequential order. There are eight marks, one per hour—four for the morning, four for the afternoon, like Indian ragas. In my mind, four of these marks are female, and four are male. These characteristics of the marks are not necessarily identifiable as such to the spectators. For the third Paperswim, at the Dia Center for the Arts in New York in 1991, a photocopied edition of the marks, on 100% cotton paper, was issued.

When I am under the paper, my universe is grey and pink. It is like both a desert and a maze. I crawl on my knees, constantly pushing the paper up, fluffing it from below so that it may not settle. My skin is covered with protective cream film but my eyes need to be lubricated hourly with prophylactic drops because the acid in the paper can do harm to my body. (After performing unprotected in Philadelphia in 1987, the exposed region of my face around my eyes was inflamed for two weeks, and I thought the burning would make me blind. Eventually, only a set of sharp, permanent new wrinkles remained as a souvenir of that experience.) My breathing under the paper is partially protected by the leotard covering my mouth and nose, and I hope my lungs are not affected.

I raise myself out from under the paper by first probing the air with the hand holding the marker and then following with the other hand, making an opening for my head and torso to come out. I then search calmly for a spot to apply my mark. After I write the sign, I join both hands above me and slowly withdraw under the paper again. As I crawl, I am accompanied by the loud crackling of the paper; the same sound is heard more faintly by the public, resembling a rumbling of waves. I try to surface where there are no marks, but eventually I realize that every time I performed Paperswim my unconscious establishes a pattern for my movements, and I always surface in the same thirty or so places.

I stop every half hour precisely, to rest and orient myself and to add suspense to the public's expectations. The focus of each pause is necessary because the labirynthine loneliness of the event often brings me to the edge of madness. Every hour on the hour I visit my box, drink a sip of water, eat one nut and a bite of apple and remind myself of the next sign to use. On the half hour I instead lie on the floor, face up, and meditate for a few minutes. I am so exhausted that most of these times I do experience a short sleep with dreams.

A rich and desperate sense of existential loneliness accompanies me in my Paperswim. When I saw photographs of it, I was reminded of Caspar David Friedrich's depictions of a person alone in an awsome landscape.

Paperswim is theatre, architecture, music, sculpture, calligraphy, and painting, all in one. It can not last less than eight hours. That length of time, besides being the standard duration of present-day office hours, allows for contemplative time and sacrificial periodicity.

In hindsight, I see the blinders I wear during Paperswim as symbolizing the painter's concentration, which makes him oblivious yet aware of the surrounding reality. The aimless nomadism of the swimmer may signify the painful yet exhilarating experience of change in life and art—a change both cursed and fostered by the cage of time and space allotted to every human being. The signs I mark on the paper are mysterious yet frankly present, indicating, perhaps, how author and receiver are linked in art not by consensual interpretation but by a crossing of possibilities—the fact of which is agreed upon, but the meaning of which hinges on subjective response.

Paperswim so far has happened with the colors black and white. Should I perform it again, I might add green, yellow, blue, and red.

Trans

reports

Free space twists diagonally through of space in transition—from hovering, to a fluid moving space inside, to the sky in the back. It is not subordinate to the function of the house. This space does not apologize and wind create space and are made for its presence. It cuts through a nostalgic system, revealing its closed nature. It displaces notions of privacy and use, while providing the experience

apparent by aluminum tubes and canvas.

1837 Tenth Street

● by Bernadette Fox
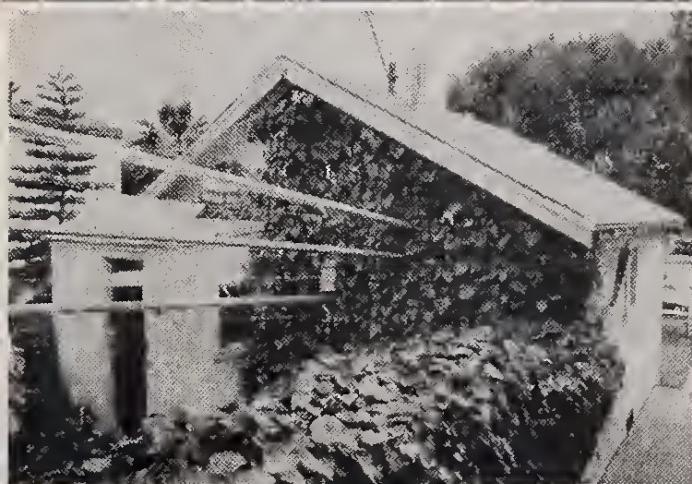
Free Space

What are the characteristics of an architecture which replaces impotence with vitality?
Which architecture dares to challenge authority and social patterns, and will not be compromised?
Which architecture exists independent and free and is without apology or justification?

Architecture must be independent and must question everything in order to free its essence. The essence of architecture is space.

The way in which space is defined allows it respectively to be free, suppressed, or killed. Flexible systems of spatial definition which reveal the totality of existence are conducive to the creation of free space. The use of fragments, movement, and the dematerialization of spatial boundaries encourage multiple readings and multiple events.

Closed, rigid systems of spatial definition mirror and reinforce existing power structures, which in turn create a static
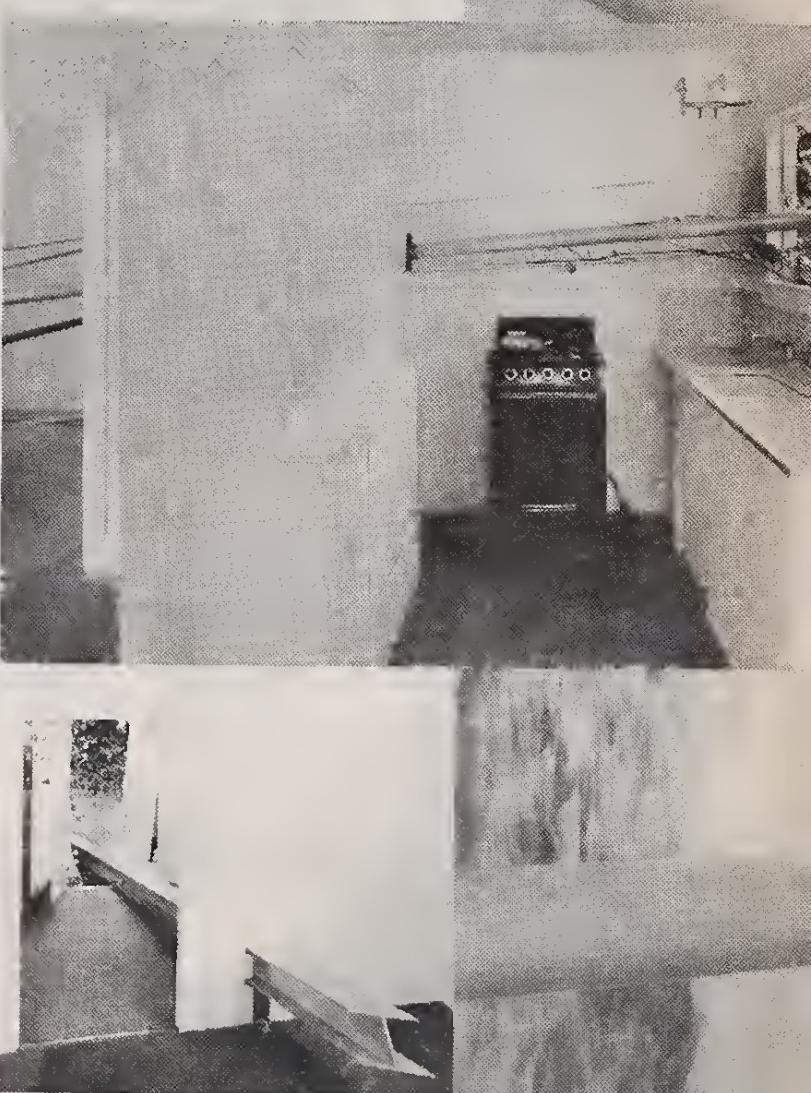
reading and space. These systems do not reevaluate a static architectural syntax. They create nostalgic, placating spaces which dictate and oppress the movement of individuals. By censoring the disquieting elements of life, closed systems stifle the ability of architecture to communicate, and render it impotent.

In order to protect the core of a vital architecture, the architect should engage in criticism and self-examination to make elements used to create free space independent from all forms of control. Once independent, these elements must lacerate the boundaries that smother architecture. They must expand awareness. Only by questioning, and by being independent of everything that subordinates architecture to something else, will architecture free its spatial essence and become vital.

GAN-CHOUEN — La grande Rue
(Kouy-Tcheou China)

An old postcard, one of several I bought at the outdoor stamp market in Barcelona's Placa Reial, captures an instant from Imperial China. Depicting a linear street on market day, the shot, taken from a low, bird's-eye view, shows a narrow, crowded road stretching to a mountainous horizon. Not exactly exotic or typically touristic, the card lacks a punctum, making it, for me, a scene of pictorial dispersal, a repository of hidden meaning, and an invitation to speculate. Restrained under and in its imagery I imagine transparent encoded layers depicting several human impulses—to move, to build, to congregate, and to communicate. And from them I read a type of nomadicism, one I think more common today than when the photographs was taken.

Between two rows of hipped, tile-roofed buildings, the street cuts a central channel that orders a hierarchic dispersal of forms. Optically it is distorted into the shape of an inverted V-channel, converging on a distant vanishing point. Angling past hatted pedestrians, vendors' umbrellas, and sloping tile roofs, the structures frame pedestrian movement in a scene architecturally determined—a strip-development or mall. The buildings' linearity enforces the pedestrian queuing and, secondarily, that of the street market. All along the card quietly pictures urban nomadicism, while its physicality (materiality) represents and even remains a valid means of nomadic communication (perhaps second only to the telephone in this century).

The card is of little interest as architectural documentation, yet it illustrate a fascinating spectrum of architectural function and material diversity, from smallest to largest structure. First and most obviously, the pedestrians are clothed—their once-animated frames supporting collapsible fabric casements, related (several times removed) to tents. More interesting as proto-architectonics are the rigid (in relation to cloth) bamboo hats—small nomadic structures similar in form, albeit on a tiny scale, to indigenous hut-structures worldwide. Even more interesting is the similarity of these personal-nomadic structures to the rows of umbrellas. And lastly, but pictorially important, the tile-roofed structures dictate a fixity to an imposed linearity, their downward slope creating a vertical channel whose vortex intersects the center of the street.

Focusing on the hats and umbrellas, we can see that from homologous shapes and materials a fundamental (generic) structural type and its use in portable shelters was highly developed and commonly employed to serve mobile individuals engaged in business and communication. The hats and umbrellas in this view represent a structural form serving nomadicism and are not usually associated with architecture. These forms are ephemeral, personal, and closer to fashion; the materials common, the use localized.

Still, in the litheness of the form and the flexibility of function we can conjure and perhaps define a likeness to conditions today.

Curiously, the photograph's ephemeral subjects— the people, hats, and umbrellas—and the physical postcard with its imprinted snapshot view, its pictorial cultural fragment, are more relevant to today's cultural nomadics than the card's obscure scenographic architecture or its antique value as a curio or historic architectural document. Presumably the permanent structures depicted could be parasitically adapted to serve an electronic world or the nomadics cultivated as place in a Disneyland or Rouse development; yet the hats and umbrellas can be

ALEXANDRIE. Sémaphore au Mex.

Сибирь.—Sibérie. № 12
Остовъ переносного юрты.—La forme de tente de kirgaises.

Fantaisie d'un mariage.

by Dennis L. Dollens

STRUCTURES nomadics:

umbrellas, huts, and a tower

seen as an early impulse away from such applied or reapplied development—the take-it-with you hats and umbrellas as well as the card itself embody the more complex precepts of cross-cultural communication. (This unused postcard, this media-medium form the turn-of-the-century, has, at the very least, communicated from China to Spain to New York, and now transgresses its own format into a another print medium).

In another stamp market postcard, a semaphore tower halfway around the world—with umbrella-like structure and circular form-splayed struts around a central pole—is pictured as it stood seaside at Alexandria. More structurally determined as cultural infrastructure (for commerce, travel, and/or defense?) than the hats or umbrellas in the China card, this tower, with its two, double-inverted umbrella-like structural pods, (its punctum), tells an unassuming story of travel and communication. Already international in its photographic language, the card's semaphore tower may represent for us a low-tech, though sophisticated, third-world initiative to join in global communications, here manifested in the form of a proto-telecommunications support structure. However, unlike the China card, which pictures an aspect off a homogeneous society, the Egyptian postcard shows a cultural intermix beyond that implied in the tower itself. In the foreground three traditionally clad figures walk toward the camera while slightly behind them two Western-clad figures, one coincidentally carrying an umbrella, stroll along a railway: two cultures represented and distinguishable by dress in a cultural clash, at least photographically, brought about by nomadics of trade, government, or personal wanderlust.

Neither view—sparsely peopled Egyptian or crowded Chinese—makes a grand touristic claim for attention. Neither is the stuff of standard monumental vistas romantically depicted in traditional postcards. The Egyptian would most likely be considered ugly and the Chinese uninteresting. As a binary set we can see (or read into them) a radical split. The card from China looks closed and homogeneous while the card from Egypt looks open, multicultural, and global, suggesting an embryonic case of architec-

tural Darwinism—where only the fittest (i.e., rich Western or Japanese) cultures will survive the nomadics of an educated, consumer, and technically literate society.

In the 1925 Egyptian card, indigenous culture is supplemented (seduced?) by Western technology and capitalism. In addition to the semaphore tower and Western clothes, railway tracks and telegraph lines lead, like the roadway in the China card, to a distant vanishing point. But unlike the homotopia of the Chinese scene, the view of Alexandria takes on the look of a spoiled landscape from its nascent industrial development, a confused cultural environment, and a suburban non-place.

In this frame, from this reading, the card actually begins to function as a nomadic warning, a complex photo rebus that in effect asks, is this what we want? (This is my hindsight reading and speculation, of course.) It offers a warning that unless we are more determined culturally, we and our equivalents of ethics, and of cultural or regional diversity may eventually drift into the web of global nomadics, our cultural space into virtual space—allowing for our widespread movement but only in a no-man's land and possibly only under closed-circuit surveillance.

More sinister in implication, the cards represent the transcultural migration of social problems through media. For example, without diverging far into recent events, the Los Angeles riots have illustrated to Americans how events of a given region can almost instantly spark continental reactions. From this we can begin to understand a new urban scale not as old-hat McLuhanism but as post-nature urbanism. Here the streets of Watts and South Central Los Angeles are nearly contiguous with those of Las Vegas, or Philadelphia, or Atlanta, or New York, and more than ever leap the oceans in a single beam to connect us with today's equivalent of the dusty Alexandria railway path or the Chinese strip development.

Back to the postcards. In the Egyptian card we see a prototypical modern architectural form—the control tower (like those at airports and prisons) and the transmission tower (broadcast and microwave)—as part of a locally produced (if not developed) communication network serving cultural nomadicism. In the Chinese card we see a portable form of shelter also serving communication (perhaps of a different order, but remember, etymologically, communication and community come from the Latin communis, meaning common). Using these cards as points of departure we can explore in sev-

eral directions. The hat/umbrella structures of the Chinese card are more obviously in the lineage of globally produced traditional forms, like those in an old postcard view of a Kurdish tent under construction. Or, even more literally, in the strut-and-frame wedding tent perched on the back of a camel in another Egyptian postcard. (Note the camel preceding with its signal bell tower.) These three latter forms physically serve architectonics while the Alexandria tower, though physical, functions as an information-processing station and in this sense is transparent (a transparency akin to the encasement of television sets—you're not aware of them while you watch a broadcast). Both types have parallels today. Yet, for this point, the Alexandria tower becomes the more interesting, its punctum more far-reaching. (Though in the same vein the camel-transported bell tower, a portable broadcast unit, is clearly nomadic and a media/medium.)

Here I should note that no claim is made for these structural types' uniqueness or for their being first of their genre. Umbrellas, for example are known in sculptural reliefs from ancient Nineveh and Egypt. On the contrary, it is more interesting that they are not. Everyone knows that communication towers have ancient and multicultural precedents—minarets, pharos, bell towers. Equally, umbrella-form and construction had long been global. We might speculate that without their strut construction and stressed paper or cloth-membrane covering, aviation might be in a very different state of development. Unorthodox, perhaps, in linkage, yet if the nomadic umbrella played a developmental role in aviation and, hence, physical communication on a vast scale, and the semaphore tower was a precursor of the microwave tower, these cards are nomadic technological documents.

The obsolescence of the actual structures we are looking at is of no concern; their transcendent forms and the mobility and communication they engendered is—

cellular phones, Boeing 747s, satellites, rockets. They connect all of us who rely on telecommunications and aviation, all of us who no longer have familial homes. Remember that the average American family moves seven times. Home no longer means what it traditionally did; it can easily be replaced with the notion of home. We are a baseless society, more closely constituted as roving media-wonders than as members of fixed population.

In the Winter 1992 edition of a British Airways in-flight magazine I came upon this startling note: "World's no. 1 Industry. Travel and tourism are growing faster than the world economy and the industry now employs one in 15 of the world's workforce and accounts for 7.3 per cent of worldwide capital investment." To catapult all tourists into techno-nomads is not my intention. Yet buried in British Airways' statistics are growing numbers of travelers who have become nomadic. Even if many have a "semipermanent address," they have no real home culture (perhaps that should read, can't forget or separate native from appropriated culture). They can't go home because they can't remember where it is. For this group, facilities replace architecture—metal or concrete huts, umbrella sheds. Way stations—airports, rent-a-cars, motels, restaurants, friends' apartments—replace stable traditional community settings. New nomads constitute community differently. They are parasitical in the sense that they feed off the kindness (or ignorance) of strangers, yet not necessarily culturally damaging since they cross-fertilize societies. For such a nomadic group, telecommunications become the communal link and in a real sense a bond enabling full intellectual participation with widely disparate groups and individuals. Their sheltering umbrella has technically been transformed from bamboo to radio waves, radiating from circling satellites instead of circling struts. Their market is non-linear and open 24 hours—vending machines and 7-11's. Their community gates are passport control borders.

And, still, in this nomadic life of packed clothes and electronics, the common postcard remains vital even as it metaphorically and sometimes physically lends itself to e-mail or the fax. From continuing to function as an architectural guide at its point of purchase to its various layers of messages, the postcard remains a quintessential modern form of communication. It is the image- and sound-bite of personal communication. And like its old cousins seen here, it can still charm, alarm, and alert.
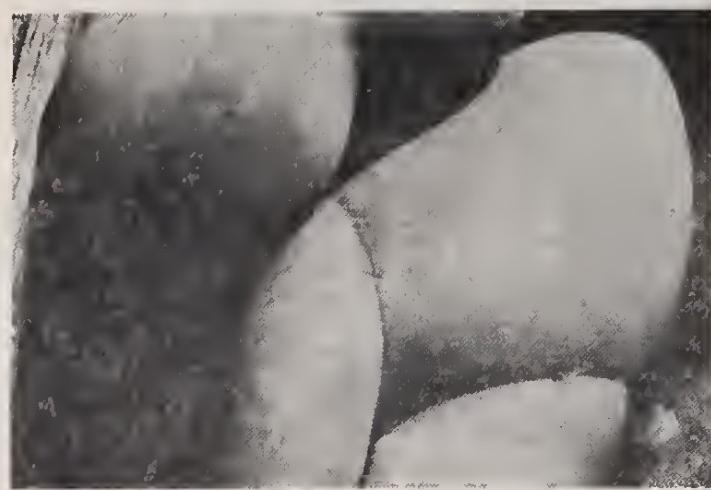
CONSUMING

by Dan Hoffman

LIGHT ALEPH—DARK ALEPH

In his story entitled "The Aleph," Jorge Luis Borges speaks of "one of the points in space that contains all other points." This is the Aleph, "the only place on Earth where all the points are seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending."[1] Borges's attraction to the Aleph is an attraction to the possibilities of vision itself, the idea that universal knowledge can be accessed through a kind of seeing that makes all things transparent to themselves. The Borges of the story longs for this vision to recapture the object of his desire, the beautiful Beatriz. The fact that Borges, the author, was blind only adds to the poignance of the tale. In this light Beatriz can be understood as vision herself and the bright (and impossible) dream of the world that she brings to Borges. The dark and narrow cellar where Borges encounters the Aleph underscores the difference between the "limits" of our (blind) bodily condition and its transcendence through the illumined vision of enlightened thought. Vision and beauty have historically assumed a powerful combination that has assigned an aesthetic to metaphysics—an aesthetic which Borges savors in the story with the delicate and lamenting memory of an old love.

Our interest in seeing all things clearly has placed considerable emphasis upon the eye and vision, the most acute of the senses. The analysis of vision and the inner workings of the eye has founded metaphysical systems in a quest for clear models of ⬤ understanding that would lead ⬤ to conceptual knowledge of the ⬤ absolute. Understood in this way, the absolute, or "truth," is an all-encompassing transparency of the world mediated through the visual mechanism. Although the Aleph of Borges is a vision of this truth, the historical Aleph is actually divided into the conditions of the light Aleph and dark Aleph.[2] The manifest certainty of the former is contrasted with the elusive uncertainty of the latter. If not in light, then how is the dark Aleph to be known? Does it open itself to us in a singular, brilliant flash or is it accessible to us by more peripheral, or even furtive means? If the light Aleph is eminently locatable as a point, is the dark Aleph locatable at all? Borges does not speak of the dark Aleph but one would suspect that it is not far away, for the depth of things is not only understood through the light of vision or certainty. This "depth" is the fertile soil of embodied circumstance from which a sense of things emerges, the surround from which the perspective of the Aleph is unearthed. It is the very "life-world" that we exist in from day to day, a world whose banality often masks the extent of its profound being. This banality is the background of the story, the seemingly ordinary life of unfulfilled passions, locked doors and empty streets. This is the world that the light Aleph illumines with its brilliant transparency and focus. The dark Aleph offers another understanding, one that approaches from the underside of things, compounding opacities to a sublimity that spirals beyond our comprehension.

What ⬤ has caused us to favor the ⬤ light Aleph and its vision as ⬤ the metaphor for knowledge? ⬤ No doubt the precision of the ⬤ eye was inspira-

tional for its ability to locate constructions such as geometry between the mind and the physical world—a metaphysical connection that maintained its precious balance until the beginning of the modern age with its emphasis upon abstract construction as the foundation for knowledge. This emphasis displaced the balance of the metaphysical connection that sought to mediate between mind and body, or construct and world. The historical remains of the metaphysical connection of mind and body has come to us in the form of perspective, which is still the dominant forum of visual representation in our culture despite the problematic claims to its truth. Its position has been affirmed largely through the dissemination of imbedded perspectival devices found in visual media such as the lens and the flat screen. Accompanying this advance, however, has been the persistent and sometimes furtive reminder that there is always something not seen, that there is a "pre-existence to the seen of a given to be seen."[3] Though the light Aleph preports to see all things clear-

ly, it is not evident from this view that desire itself is visible. This un-seen aspect, the "stain," as Lacan calls it, infects our presumptions of clear seeing as knowledge. It is that which impels our vision and yet is invisible to us except in the form of an incidental trace. It is always elusive, leaving its mark as a disturbing reminder that the unconscious is always implicated in that which we gather around ourselves in vision. Merleau-Ponty refers to another aspect of the un-seen in the form of the shadow that is necessarily part of the spatiality of sight: "We see that the hand pointing to us in [Rembrandt's] *The Nightwatch* is truly there only when we see that its shadow on the captain's body presents it simultaneously in profile."[4] For Merleau-Ponty "to see an object, it is necessary not to see the play of shadows and light around it."[5] The light of vision is permeated by the tonalities of darkness, for within sight itself we find a virtual world of oppositions that give form to an image. Lacan gives another example of the un-seen in the phenomena of anamorphosis, whereby an image is presented to view that is warped or displaced from a preferred axis of viewing. In the painting *The Ambassadors* by Holbein, two figures are presented to the viewer in a straightforward manner except for a rather mysterious unformed area (stain?) before them that "appears to be flying through the air."[6] However, when one views it momentarily at an oblique angle, the figure of a skull emerges from the heretofore unformed area. The skull serves as a reminder of this "other" vision residing in perspective. We come to realize that the point of view that perspective offers comes through the displacement of all that is not shown to the oriented eye—that behind or within the "clarity" of perspective lies the inevitable dark component of the death, the dark Aleph. The skull emerges from this other territory. The vanity that causes us to not see its disturbing presence is now understood to be in the very logic of the perspective point of view.

Something of this "death" is visible in the "unconscious" use of mediated technology today in the form of home videos, snapshots, and dubbing. Its widespread distribution is now forcing us to confront what was so carefully hidden before. Our "vanity" is being exposed and eroded by a dark humor that cannot be suppressed. It is the tenor of the age and Mark West plays it with abandon.

VISION

SURVIVING LOGIC

The dark Aleph is without this singular point of view. Rather, its function is to disperse vision from a unifying, metaphysical aspect. Many of the experiments of modern art have taken as their theme the questioning or dis-illusioning of the unifying view. In Mark West's early drawings this questioning is flagged with the rueful title "Surviving Logic." Here he accepts the pervasive and pressing demands of the "logical" tradition of vision served up by the phenomena of perspective, yet seeks to undermine its very foundations through a manipulation of the means of its representation. "Surviving Logic" is a viral operation upon the perspectival code, one that feeds upon the powerful ordering of its host. These inversions take the form of cut-ups of found photographs which are manipulated further by erasing, or blanking out various sections within them. This double or "dubbing" operation disperses the perspectival field and permits the injection of various images into one work. Building over the techniques of Cubism and montage, where a single scene is approached from multiple points of view, the drawings of the Surviving Logic series make present a panorama of multiplicities where each detail lays claim to its own point of view. The double negation (cut-up-erasure) liberates the field of the picture, preparing it for an inclusive rather than an exclusive field of operations, a space for a bricollage of immense and minute proportions.

BLACKOUTS

In subsequent work, all vestiges of Cubist (cut-up) manipulations are erased. This comes as a result of the refinement of the erasure procedure by the so-called "blackout" technique, where the cut-up photographs are painstakingly drawn over with graphite. In such a way a fine-grained darkness infects the tableau, distributing throughout an aura of perspectival depth without the unifying organization of a single point of view. One could say that the atmosphere of perspective haunts the scene wherein each particle of the drawing possesses its own genus of depth. The manipulation of the point of view shrinks and stretches objects out of recognition like a myriad of lenses coursing through the space of the image—an anamorphosic field where things warp in and out of recognition. There is the disturbing feeling that we have sensed something of them before, an unsettling déjà vu without the reward of a final recollection.

West is characteristically vague concerning his methods. But how does he achieve the fuzzy precision of his drawings? How is he able to sustain such an intensity of invention? Considering the problem of his technique further, I have found it helpful to refer back to Leonardo's instructions on drawing in his *Treatise on Painting*. The passage is quoted in full since it bears an intriguing but curiously inverted relationship to what one would suspect to be the drawing technique used in the *Blackouts*.

A WAY OF DEVELOPING AND AROUSING THE MIND TO VARIOUS INVENTIONS

I cannot forbear to mention among these precepts a new device for study which, although it may seem but trivial and almost ludicrous, is nevertheless extremely useful in arousing the mind to various inventions: When you look at a wall spotted with stains, or with a mixture of stones, if you have to devise some scene, you may discover a resemblance to various landscapes, beautified with mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, plains, wide valleys, and hills in varied arrangement; or, again, you may see battles and figures in action; or strange faces and costumes, and an endless variety of objects, which you could reduce to complete and well-drawn forms. And these appear on such walls confusedly, like the sound of bells in whose jangle you may find any name or word you choose to imagine. [7]

Leonardo asks us to begin with something indeterminate and arbitrary in vision, such as a stain. The variety of imagined objects are then to be *"reduce[d]* to complete and well drawn forms" (Emphasis added) West, on the other hand, begins with photographs that by their nature already possess fragments of completed form, which are then operated upon or "erased" to the point that the are just unrecognizable. Rather than reducing the photographic image, the graphite infection multiplies its readings through binding or mating it to other, adjacent images, causing the "image" continually slip out from recognition. The resulting drawing possesses a density of possible interpretations similar to that of Leonardo's stain. Indeed, it would seem from the title of his instructions on drawing that Leonardo himself is more intrigued by the "various inventions" to be found within the indeterminacy of the stain than in the completed, drawn forms. His fascination with the fertile field of the stain points to a latent, even psychological recognition that the stain can absorb projections of the desiring subject through its indeterminacy, not unlike the blotches of a Rorschach test. West plays upon this indeterminacy by bringing the image to the precise underside of recognition as an object. We have the sense of what the anti-figures of the *Blackouts* might be, but naming them is a slippery task that itself demands invention and interpretation.

DRAWING AS LUBRICATION

The choice of the blackout method of partial erasure is significant, for graphite possesses a continuous gradient of tone from the lightest of greys (or light-blacks) to black itself. This enables West to match any tone on the surface of the photograph, thereby freeing up the rigid perspectival organization that binds it to recognition. The result is an aqueous field of vision that erases the edgelike distinction of an object to its surround—replacing the recognition of the object with a knot-like twisting and inversion. The fluidity of the graphite has no planar edges, its molecular structure encourages the continuity rather than the discontinuity of surface and space. The lubrication of this edge of identity is similar to the experience of walking in the darkness of night where the visual limits of things are blurred. In this sense, the space of darkness is like a medium that dissembles the threshold of things, blurring the distinction of bodily limits. The space of darkness is filled. It touches us directly, enveloping and penetrating us throughout. We find that the ego is permeable to darkness and not to light. By immersing ourselves in darkness all manner of desires are loosened and exposed. Here we begin to encounter the danger of the dark Aleph, for as opposed to the simultaneous transparency of the light Aleph, darkness opens towards an unending obscurity of body. It is a "descent into hell"[8] accelerated by the desire to become one with all things through the "generalization of space and matter."[9] If there is a primal substance in West's universe, it certainly would be an ooze rather than a solid or void. The infinitude resolves itself in the substance of matter rather than the emptiness of a void. It is the very opposite of the pure spatium of Descartes, that abstracted extension that enables the projection of the logic of vision and reason.

The *Blackouts* of Mark West offer us a revisioning of "truth" as symbolized by the light Aleph. Within the darkness of the *Blackouts* the unforeseeable replaces truth as clear foreknowledge. The transparent truth of the the light Aleph is dissolved into a medium of becoming within which lurk shadows of doubt and wonder subversive to the control of objective vision. (By objective I refer to the mathematical means of quantifying and locating objects in space.) The double

action of drawing and erasure does not cancel out the function of vision, but rather enfolds it upon itself. Here we find ourselves in a viscous medium of sight, inside a black eyeball of space, a place where the "busy hum" of potentiality and the proliferation of shades exist without brilliance, the dark side of Borge's Aleph represented in a dull, throbbing glow. We are fascinated and repulsed by West's precocious abandon, his desire to plunge into the underbelly of vision.

THE THEATER OF AMNESIA

Today "all things" include not only the biological realm of plants and animals and the geology of minerals, but also the by-products of a delirious surplus of production. The lubricating fluid used in West's *Blackouts* must have an industrial strength as well as a decoding intelligence to loosen the bonds of use that determine its products. The "found" photographs that are the raw material for the *Blackout* procedure contain images of the productions of our recent pyrotechnic history—vast fields of debris accumulated from the many wars of this century. These delirious productions form a rich site for the consuming vision of West. Piles of confusion inspire the eye to multiple interpretations and open paths of speculation with which to spawn new organisms. These organisms, directed by genetic codes of violence imbedded in the material of excess, begin to consume each other in vast feeding frenzies where one generation of production preys upon the next. The *Blackouts* are black holes which, in their collapse, attract unabsorbed surpluses into "ecstatic orgies"[10] of waste and debris. If there is a program to the architect's work, it is the construction of a system of digestion that consumes the images of the past and near present, reconfiguring them into recycled bodies of a spectral dimension. These drawings become a virtual "Theater of Amnesia" (the term is from a title of related work by West) where images are simultaneously produced and drawn outside the range of recognition and memory. By consuming images we forget their origins and make way for new configurations. In a sense, the *Blackouts* represent a desire not to see. Maybe we have seen enough and desire to circulate our vision into the obscure medium of the body so that it re-emerges stained by the waters of our forgetfulness.

DUB AND BLIND VARIATION

The desire "not to see" can be understood as an adaptation to an environment of proliferating images. It is not, however, a simple negation of vision, but a transformation of its received aspects as we find them injected into our cultural medium. By painstakingly blacking out or staining the surface of images within the space of the pho-

tographs, each aspect of the image is reached into and touched. The intention of the touch is not to fix the image in space, but to stain it with another, more powerful code to break the habitual recognition of an object of vision. West points out that, like the bass lines of reggae, the medium of the *Blackouts* is absorptive to the many "samplings" of formal debris that can be arrayed within it. The base is the prime genetic code common to all the samplings. (In his musical experiments West has claimed to have found the dub code common to the Bulgarian Women's Chorus, the chants of the Kalahari Bushmen, and Frank Sinatra.) This master dub in the *Blackouts* is not developed consciously, for it would be impossible to predetermine the sense of a work of such complexity. Rather, the code is found through a persistent and thorough trial-and-error method of "blind variation"[11] that seeks to find a way through the unthinking recognition of received images. In such a way a momentary integration is achieved and the tonality of sight is altered.

This cycle of adaptation through transformation is similar to the theories of evolutionary epistemology as put forth by Karl Popper and others. In their view, knowledge is related to the process of active transformation of an environment through chance or "blind" mechanisms of change within an organism. "As Popper would have it: organisms by being active seekers are the active makers of their senses."[12] These newly developed senses direct the organism (or intelligence) towards new aspects of the environment which they colonize and therefore transform. Knowledge can be understood as a manifestation of a sense, a guide for behavior in the environment.

The trial-and-error method is considered as the explanation of an organism's need to deal with the continually emerging problems that confront it in its environment and is similar to my theories of how West operates upon his work. One proceeds here by a strategic circling around that which is unknown, an eye-hand meditation similar to the back and forth seeking or fleeing motion of organisms. This circulation of knowledge and vision through the random processes of nature and the survival imperatives of the body illustrates the latent biologism in West's work. The dry metaphors of physics do not function here. In the *Blackouts*, we are immersed in photosynthetic mediums observing the growth and decay of forms. Vision is no longer represented by the transparent intelligence of light, but is submerged into blind variation processes, the mechanism for the intelligence of seeking organisms. Light is not necessarily the guide in this seeking. In one of the many myths inspired by science, Günther Wächtershäuser has recently speculated that the first sensory reaction of the earth's primal organisms may very well have been a flight from light rather than an attraction to its nutritional possibilities. He argues that these early organisms did not have the more complex feature of a protective, peripheral layer and by necessity sought the darkened environment of clay or sand for their inhabitation.[13] Hence the darkness of the earth (and body) is haunted by a mud alive with organisms that flee from light. Intelligence is born with a tropism that is drawn to the protection of opacity rather than the destructive exposure of light and transparency.

VEGETAL ERECTIONS

"Only human beings, tearing themselves away from peaceful animal horizontality, at the cost of the ignoble and painful efforts that can be seen in the faces of great apes, have succeeded in appropriating the vegetal erection and in letting themselves be polarized, in a certain sense, by the sky."[14]
—Bataille

Biological preoccupations intensify in West's work as it moves from the *Blackouts* to the *Dr. X and Y* series. This shift is paralleled by a transformation in the technique of making the drawings. Photographs are no longer used as a departure point as they had been in previous series. In this most recent work, the virtuosity of the hand has absorbed the spatial genetics of the *Blackouts* and can now draw in their absence. But has the photographic been removed altogether? It is possible that the *Dr. X and Y* series are drawings *over* photographs of previous work projected onto a surface with a slide. Here we have work that feeds upon itself, one technique subsuming the other. The title of the series can be considered as another transformative play upon the inheritance of a previous, perspectival age, wherein the "X" and "Y" of Cartesian geometry are also supplanted by the X and Y chromosomes of genetic structure.

What emerges from this process are West's latent obsessions with vegetal organisms and their sexual appetites. Technology has now entered the bloodstream—an occurrence predicted by William Burroughs. No longer can we contrast biology and technology, industry and sex, human and vegetal, and production and waste. Bodily desire is now the great engine that secretes itself into venous passages of the environment. West treats this ingestion with the humorous sense of a body circulating with the amorous juices of plants, their delirious chemistry loosening our most serious endeavors. "Drunkenness is the triumphal eruption of the plant in us."[15]

Dr. X and Y

detail, *Blackout*

The "eruption" of the vegetal body in this most recent work has been accompanied by a movement towards the possibilities building in the construction process West has aptly named "Pressure Building." This form of erection is all the more notable for its close affinity to the drawings in the *Dr. X and Y* series. It is as if by becoming vegetal the drawings could actively grow themselves off ᶠ the page. Like the *Blackout* technique, the simplicity of the basic system belies the virtuosity possible in its execution. As I understand it, a sack of cloth is held up by a scaffold and bound in various ways with rope. Concrete is then poured into the sack, thereby stretching the fabric. The fabric formwork is removed after the concrete has hardened. (Imprints of the restraining fabric and ropework can be seen on the surface of the concrete.) With this technique comes the possibility of liberating construction methods from the geometrically predetermined building systems that have historically dominated architecture. The spontaneity of this method is consistent with the architect West's interest in simple techniques that bring a level of blind variation to the work, for the number of ways of binding a cloth column seems limitless. Again, technique becomes an obsession with West. In this case it is the primitive yet precise technique of knot tying that is the binding element in the construction. The mastery of the knot relies more upon a haptic memory than upon a logical, geometric knowledge. We find it difficult to trace its twists and turns as the rope turns around itself. Like the *Blackout* technique, the manner of its functioning confounds and compels us with its virtuosity.

We seem to be in the presence of a trick that twists the logic of vision, an ancient sleight of hand that curiously finds itself at home in the complex and dizzying world of polymer-cloth, concrete and biology. It is also impossible to predict with exactitude the interactive behavior of the concrete and the cloth as the formwork swallows its load. The form of the pour is an exact record of the distribution of the loads as they appeared at the concrete's hardening—a formwork process that records the pressure loads within it. The relationship between the liquid concrete, the pliant

cloth and the resisting rope are all registered upon the surface where tension recalls the force of turgidity, whereby the wall of a cell is distended to its limit by fluids within the cell itself. The tautness of the cell wall defines its shape and is a sign of the cell's life. Such is the scientific term to describe "the impeccable erection of plants"[16] referred to by Bataille. This erection is the brief, "explosive" growth along the vertical axis along a radius of the Earth, connecting the root of the plant in the earth to the "infinite expanse of the sky."[17] Growth along this axis always has its vertiginous dimensions, for it is also the axis of the gravity of falling bodies. The brief flowering of vegetal growth is accomplished despite the loads that pull it back to the earth. We anticipate its collapse, for we know all too well the feeling of weight upon our bodies, the sinking power of gravity that draws us to our grave.

It was the faith of the architect Gaudi that turned the descending force upon itself so that it ascended in the form of a construction of stone; a miraculous lever in the form of a mirrored reflection of a catenary force diagram. The result were buildings that grew up from the Earth with the familiar aspiration of a "vegetal erection." The columns of the architect West are alive with the same vibrancy, the soaring aspect of Gaudi's faith being replaced by a turgid belly laughter of distended cloth. We cannot suppress a smile of recognition as we see and hear the concrete stretch against the resistance of its membranous skin. The unashamed erotism of these columns is a welcome release from the concerns of a dead geometry. The humor in this work is infectious, like the mocking grotesques of the medieval

masons that slip between the all-too-serious concerns of load and geometry. Laughter is a form of lubrication, an emotional graphite that releases the friction of the suppressed.

(DUBBED) POSTSCRIPT

In a postscript to "The Aleph," Borges questioned the initial euphoria of his vision with the thought that it must have been a "false Aleph." This was due to some subsequent, esoteric research on the subject which located the "true" Aleph inside "the pillar of a mosque from the seventh century." Evidently the true Aleph was invisible and could be located only by a "busy hum" discernable when one put an ear up against the column. The memory of Beatriz also fades as the Aleph slips from view into the opacity of the stone column; the beautiful face that carried the promise and memory of the metaphysical and now mythical point that gave transparency to all things. "I myself am distorting and losing under the wearing away of the years the face of Beatriz."[19] The lament of Borges is for the passing of an age of great and beautiful visions. Its highly visible frequency has now been absorbed by the low, resonating medium of the dub. As a player of this dark medium, Mark West is always careful to remind us of its origins in the slippery regions of our embodied soul. The lesson of the light Aleph is that its vision is made with nothing more than the afterglow of the things of this world compressed into a point. The desire for transparency is met with a fleeting vision. Possibly, the dark Aleph shows a more inclusive and forgiving way.

1. Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1733–1969* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), p. 23.

2. I thank Manuel Antonio Baez for this and other precise observations regarding the metaphysical tradition and its relationship to vision.

3. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978), p. 74.

4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, Il. Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 167.

5. Ibid., p. 167.

6. Lacan, p. 88.

7. Jean Paul Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo DaVinci*, (Oxford University Press, 1939), I thank Mr. Baez for suggesting this piece.

8. Roger Caiffols, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia", in *October, the First Decade*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987), p. 73.

9. Caiffols, p. 73.

10. Georges Bataille as quoted by Jürgen Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987), p. 225.

11. Donald T. Campbell "Blind Variation and Selective Retention," in *Evolutionary Epistemology, Theory of Rationality and the Sociology of Knowledge*, Gerard Radnitzky and W.W. Barley, III (LaSalfe, Illinois: Open Court, 1987), p. 97.

12. Günther Wächtershäuser, "On Light and Life, and the Origins of Perception," in *Evolutionary Epistemology*, p. 138.

13. Ibid., p. 124.

14. Georges Bataille, "The Pineal Eye," In *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927–1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 83.

15. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p.11.

16. "The Pineal Eye" p. 11.

17. Ibid., p. 83.

18. Borges, p. 30.

19. Ibid., p. 30.

reports

33

"...the roads of the gods had to be more splendid and more magnificent than anything used by mortals. "[1]

BLUE HIGHWAY

"Driving can be described as a sequence played to the eyes of a captive, somewhat fearful, but partially inattentive audience, whose vision is filtered and directed forward, concentrated particularly on the foreground at points of decision, or in sharply constricted spaces. "[2]

DECEMBER 12, 1991, 2:30 PM, INTERSTATE 476, PENNSYLVANIA.
I have been studying highways for the past few years, but this is the most physically intimate I have ever been with one. I slip past a barrier and sneak down the side of a berm into a deep canyon of bulldozed earth. I am right in It. The embankments are over 30 feet high on either side. There are sloping berms that have been freshly planted with juniper, rosa rugosa, wild grasses, and clover. Wood chips and plastic netting help to hold down the newly laid turf.

I walk for a few miles and then take a rest. You can't see anything beyond the berms — just sky and a strand of cloud that curls out to the west beyond the embankments. It is the perfect afternoon for a stroll down the middle lane of a superhighway.

Officially called the Veterans Memorial Highway, or Interstate 476, this new road Is best known to Pennsylvania taxpayers as the "Blue Route," so named for the quivering blue line that first appeared on a map in 1963. It runs a 21.5-mile course from Rt. 95 in the south up to the Pennsylvania Turnpike in the north. It is one of the final links in America's network of interstate highways. Construction on the highway began in 1967 but is only now being completed, 25 years later—less than a mile per year, at a total cost of $750 million.

The broken yellow lines are freshly painted and the granular edges of the shoulders and gores have a perfectly consistent texture. The surface of the road itself is almost too smooth and clean to be believed. There are no skid marks, potholes, fissures, gasoline spills, oil drippings. A highway's battered surface is usually a multi-layered palimpset, but this one is a clean slate, fresh and unmarked, as if in a dream. No one will ever see it this way again. It has no history yet, no story, no blood sacrifices.

I would like to say that the Blue Route shrugged its shoulders as I walked down its center lane—that I was nothing more than a gnat on the back of an elephant—and that while it was still a virgin highway, I could already feel an anxious movement of cars and trucks hurtling down its clean new surface.

I walk with uneasy steps, ultra-aware of how I am walking—the heels of my boots sloping to one side and my gait slightly awkward. I can hear the sound of my own footsteps ringing down the line and I feel a presence bearing down on me from behind, as if I were being followed.

I kneel down in the middle of the highway, put my ear to the pavement, and listen very carefully.

This thing is ripe! It is a flattened-out volcano, ready to erupt. And this noise! There are no vehicles, but if you listen closley there is something else, deep and persistent. Sound waves bounce off walls and the highway is a horizontal wall picking up a range of distant echoes.

I am marching along, feeling like the last man on earth. I am alone with my thoughts and my thoughts are bouncing back and forth against the earthen berms.

Road engineering, like everything else in the ancient world, was in the service of the gods. Symbolic patterns of multicolored shells were set into a lime-and-sand mortar paving in the sacred roadway at Taxila, India during the Mauryan era (400–200 BC). In the Assyrian city of Assur, ceremonial roadways were built on foundations of burnt brick. Smooth road surfaces were made from large slabs of rock that were carved with parallel ruts to help guide the wheels of the holy chariots.

The highway has its own linear force of gravity and I can feel the whole fresh surface of the road pulling at my flesh. I look over my shoulder and feel the wind on my face.

Why is it taking me so long to reach that bend in the road ? Normally I would be seeing all of this from behind the wheel of a car, moving forward at a rapid pace, but I am on foot and distances are deceptive. I have minutes instead of seconds to look at each feature of the roadscape. (How would Ruskin see it?)

I try running to correct the error in perception, but the image of myself running down an empty highway suddenly seems outrageous and I slow down again.

I will just walk. No one even knows I am here. I will go a little bit further. I can always climb up the side of one of the grassy embankments and escape.

I pass a group of highway workers erecting one of the new noise barriers. They are lowering thick concrete slabs into place and fitting them between vertical steel stanchions.

It is so quiet now... but there is something else, a humming, buried within the hush. I kneel down in the middle of the highway, put my ear to the pavement and listen very carefully.

**WHHISSSSHHH...
WHHOOOOOAAAA...**

It has a sound all its own—echoes, squeeks, bumps, shuffles, slammings, birds tweeting, lawn mowers grinding, bees buzzing, phones ringing, garage doors opening, glass breaking, engines revving, horns blowing, radios, TVs, all blended together into a muffled purée of gray noise—voice of the road:

WHHOOOOOAAAA...

Now it seems as if the whole road were getting wider—opening out to the north. It envelopes me and then pushes me up against the sky. I get its meaning for only an instant and then lose it again. I walk faster and move closer to the side of the road along the gritty shoulder. It is sheer arrogance to try to walk a highway into being. It has been surveyed and paved and now, in another few days, they will cut a red, white, and blue ribbon and it will start.

notes 1 Geoffrey Hindley, *A History of Roads*, (1971). 2 Kevin Lynch, Donald Appleyard, and John P. Myer "The View From the Road A Highway Redesigned for the Orama of Driving." *Architectural Forum* (October 1963).

Chiberly Hills. Your Sign. Washington Village. These are the names of just a few of the new breed of "American-style" housing developments have sprung up in Japan over the last few years. I write "new breed" because Japan has been experimenting with American—and English—residential planning since the late 19th century. Some early adaptations, such as Denenchofu, a verdant planned community a few minutes west of Shibuya, have been notably successful. Established prior to the great Kanto earthquake of 1923, at about a million dollars per square meter, it now boasts the highest residential property values in the country.

Even at 100,000,000 Yen a piece (roughly $770,000)—land excluded—the new home designs are both more affordable and more widespread than the average single-family house. With an average of 450 to 500 square meters, they are also double the size. The market is formed by a wide circle of new millionaires from the now-burst real estate bubble of the 1980s. And now that 99-year home loans have become common, home-buyers have greater incentive to create, find, or build houses with a higher degree of comfort as well as status. Although shoe-horned into tiny lots, the new built-for-vistas ancestral homes are less likely to tarnish by the time the great-grandchildren finally pay off the debt.

Although much of Japan's best architecture can be found in authentic Japanese homes, the prefab is the only affordable option for most home-buyers. Intensive R&D by the nation's major home manufacturers has exploded the number of options available for prefab interiors. Due to the fact that so much of the market is rural, models based on traditional types, with decoratively exposed wood, heavy tile roofs, and extensive use of tatami and shoji are still the best sellers. In addition, the "American-style" house has been a consistent post war favorite. Unfortunately—unless one has the right sense of humor—these houses generally appear to have been modeled after the cheapest and kitschiest American tract houses. Most Japanese took this hilarious new housing syntax as the "real thing," which worked fine until the Japanese started to travel overseas in greater numbers, and began to bring home stricter notions of what the "authentic" American home should be like.

Although this concern for home styling may seem frivolous, it lies at the root of a number of larger issues, one of which is the quality of life—tangential to which are issues of substitution, simulation and imitation (flatness; mediated and mediable images) versus "real" things with "real" qualities. In Japan, so little is real that people, especially those conditioned by the urban context, have lost the ability to differentiate. Further, the American and Japanese television-based ideas of lifestyles manifested here have so little to do with reality that life at home becomes at best a shabby approximation of professional screenwriters' fantasies. The difference between an authentic house, Japanese or American, and the run of the mill variety is akin to that between Disneyland and a local carnival: Both are fantasies, but one is more thoroughly designed. Finally, although ad copy claims that the new homes are manufactured for the sole purpose of improving people's lives, they would not have gotten off the drawing board if not for some very high-level initia-

by Azby Brown

above and right:
YOUR SIGN (1991)
Model home by Mitsui Homes,
Tokyo

tives aimed at rectifying the trade imbalance between the United States and Japan.

The import drive is behind most of the new developments. In some projects, such as Washington Village in the Hyogo prefecture, this is openly admitted: Spokespeople there state that a major aim of the project is to use lumber imported from the United States. In fact, the projects use not only American lumber products, but also 2x4 construction techniques. And this brings us to the other large issue looming behind the shingled saltboxes: Who will drive the final nail into the coffin of the traditional carpenter?

Based on earthquake-proof jointed frames for which nails and plywood sheathing are largely superfluous, traditional carpentry has been dying a slow death since the turn of the century. The 2x4 house needs no joints; a skillsaw and nails are enough. The labor and material costs involved are considerably less than those of the jointed frame. Although a high-quality Japanese-style house—one that would have been considered medium quality 150 years ago—is only within reach of the really wealthy, many can still afford a simpler version. As the 2x4 house proliferates, the jointed frame may well disappear altogether, and with it vanishes a fundamental, identity-shaping cultural experience.

The new "authentic" American-style home boom signals a basic shift in the notion of what the home is, what families are, and how they might express themselves and their relationships through their living spaces. It signifies the evolution of a new lifestyle, a lifestyle influenced by travel and wealth, by first-hand knowledge of how others live, and by the desire for more space and comfort. The post-war generation has been conditioned to accept minuscule apartments, with none of the virtues of the traditional space and none of the amenities of the foreign model. Today, many couples want a space and atmosphere

conducive to the entertainment of guests. In addition to space for home entertainment, they want more sunlight and kitchens they can eat breakfast in. The New American-style home is built with this in mind. Parlor, den, family room—these are all new concepts which need to be explained both to potential buyers and to the manufacturers themselves.

the LEFT-HAND DRIVE house

Yet, with all these novelties, the Japanese still take their shoes off inside, and this illustrates another facet of the marketing debate. To what degree should the New American-style house be modified to fit current Japanese lifestyles? And to what degree should it be left as it is, providing the inhabitants with both status and authenticity? Enter the "foreign expert." The marketers of one of the New American-style houses had reached an impasse and called me, a specialist in both American and Japanese traditional construction, in as a consultant. Their very up-market home line was aimed largely at Japanese executives who had spent years in the United States (primarily in Westchester County). Realizing that the Japanese who can afford it often choose to drive imported cars, whose left-hand drive is a symbol of both wealth and polycultural competence, the best marketing strategy seemed clear. "It is simple," I told them "The people who will buy these houses already know how to live in them. That's why they want them. Leave the designs as purely 'American' as possible, and market them as 'Left-Hand Drive Houses.'" The boardroom erupted in laughter, and the name stuck. Image is no longer enough, at least not for the elite. It must be coupled with the opportunity to make a show of using the right fork, of asking politely for "more of that excellent Chardonnay," and with the ability to tell the prospective son-in-law that, instead of waiting in the *genkan* or *o-setsu-ma*, he may either "sit here in the parlor, or join us in the den." Red wine with meat? Absolutely! Left-hand drive? No problem! Tennis, anyone?

Azby Brown is writer and artist who lives in Tokyo.

by Rika Sakuma

THOMASSON

When I was a child, my grandfather used to go to the woods to hunt for nicely shaped roots of fallen trees. When he found one he liked, he took it home, washed off the dirt, and let it dry for several months.

FIGURE A

Once the root dried, he polished it with old cloth and placed it in the alcove. I believe that it was not just the elegant form of the roots which satisfied my grandfather's sense of beauty; it was also the hunt, the discovery. To him, beauty signified an experience he had with an object; it was his way of "seeing."

Thomasson was originally conceived by the Japanese artist Genpei Akosegowo, who defined it as "useless objects attached to a piece of real estate and kept in fair preservation." The first discovery of a Thomasson was the "pure staircase of Yotsuya": a staircase leading nowhere (FIGURE A). The evident explanation for this "pure" manifestation of "staircosehood" seems that it was preserved in order to save the cost of tearing it down. On closer inspection, however, one discovers that one of the bars on the railing has been replaced with a new piece of wood. Apparently, the owner deemed it necessary to upkeep even the obsolescent.

Akagesawa, who discovered the staircase, wandered what could be the reason for this attention. The staircase was not a work of art, and many people passed by without noticing it. It was simply there. Curious with its existence, Akogesawo decided to call it "super-art."

A second example of super-art is the remainder of a telephone pole, next to which a new concrete pole was erected (FIGURE B). A tin-plate was added to keep the pole from rotting. Evidently, here too somebody wished to preserve the object. Other examples of Thomasson include the "pure tunnel" (FIGURE C), the "pure balcony" (FIGURE D), and the "pure doorknob" which still turns (FIGURE E). All these artifacts are oestheticolly refined in terms of the simplicity with which their "uselessness" is manifested.

As if they are organisms of some kind, there exists traces of effort to keep them alive. It was the combination of this feature with the quality of uselessness which made it difficult for Akogesawa to find a fitting name for his collection of discoveries. Unexpectedly, an American baseball player helped him out. His name was Gary Thomasson (FIGURE F). Signed by

FIGURE B

the Tokyo Giants in 1981, Thomasson broke the record of strikeouts in the history of the Central League. The record earned him the nickname "electric fan" for stirring the air with his bat. Due to his two-year contract with the Tokyo Giants, Thomasson was "preserved in a fair condition" at the cost of 250,000 dollars a year, and his name was appropriate to identify the presence of "uselessness" within the world built on usefulness.

FIGURE C

But just as Gary Thomasson was removed from the Tokyo Giants, Akasegawa began to fear the disappearance of Thomassons too. (The pure staircase of Yotsuya was already torn down.) Therefore, he decided to urge people to find and record Thomassons, and with his students, he started to collect the photographs of existing Thomassons more vigorously. The group later became known as the "Thomasson Observatory."

When the mass media began to cover the Thomasson phenomena, the Thomasson Observatory expanded as more people became involved. University students, professors, magazine editors, housewives, municipal officials— everybody who was attracted to the mysterious quality of the super-art—roamed about the city of Tokyo (and eventually all over Japan) in search of Thomassons. Many detailed reports of discoveries—with both comments and photographs—were sent

to the Observatory. In 1987, the reports which had been accumulated over the years come out in the form of a 500-page book entitled *Cho-geijutsu Tomason* (Thomasson, the Super-Art).

The peak years of Thomasson coincided with the boom years of the land price rise in Tokyo from 1986 to 1988. After 1988, when the real estate market began to fall, attention from the mass culture for Thomasson also retreated. It was eventually absorbed into a broader movement called the "Roadside Observation Society," which came to assume an activist role in historical preservation and urban planning. The Roadside Observation Society raised the people's consciousness regarding the urban environment by advocating the "observation" of the city with "naturalist's eyes." Its current popularity is a tribute to the ground-breaking work of Akagesawa.

The widespread search for Thomassons was, in a sense, a response to the madness of Tokyo in the eighties. It was an attempt to recapture the city from the "invisible hands" that were turning the city into a "pure" manifestation of the "use-value." The Thomasson phenomenon was also a critique of the newly emerging suburban culture which proliferated houses with fake chimneys, weathercocks, and picture windows, features that were "useless" except as status symbols. In addition, it was a cari

FIGURE D

cature of the then-expanding Japanese high-art market, where von Goghs and Picassos were sold as commodities along with other monetary holdings. But what is most important about Thomasson is that it revived the power of "seeing" as my grandfather did, a quality which enabled people to regain their experience with an environment that seemed more and more alien.

the super art

Although "seeing" has always been an important element in both Western and Eastern art, it has a special significance in some of the Japanese arts. Take, for example, the art of "Bansai," where people spend hours and hours looking at a dwarf tree. They are supposed to trim the branches while they look. Most time, however, is spent on looking, not on trimming. "Bansai" lovers are thus active viewers who create new images through "seeing." Since seeing, more than creating, forms an integral part of the creative process here, the Western distinction between the artist and the viewer erodes.

In Thomasson, "seeing" plays an important part because Thomassons are not created but discovered. If someone would build a

FIGURE E

useless staircase and place it in a gallery, he would preclude the viewer from actively seeing (discovering) the object. In contrast, the authorless Thomasson seeks to empower the viewer——something beyond art in the conventional sense.

Akagesawo's reintroduction of the power of seeing has

FIGURE F

turned Tokyo into a city that offers us what the woods offered my grandfather. If we lose the power of seeing, the city will alienate us further and further. If, on the other hand, we can continue finding Thomassons, then the city can be livable once again.

Rika Sakuma was born in Nagoya, Japan, in 1959. She earned her bachelor's degree at Tokyo University, where she majored in psychology. In the subsequent seven years, Ms. Sakuma worked for the marketing division of the real estate developer PARCO, where she co-authored several books on Tokyo's urban development. She also published many articles on consumer behavior and mass culture. In 1989, Ms. Sakuma came to New York University, where she earned her MA in American Civilization.

EXQUISI


Sheep, model.
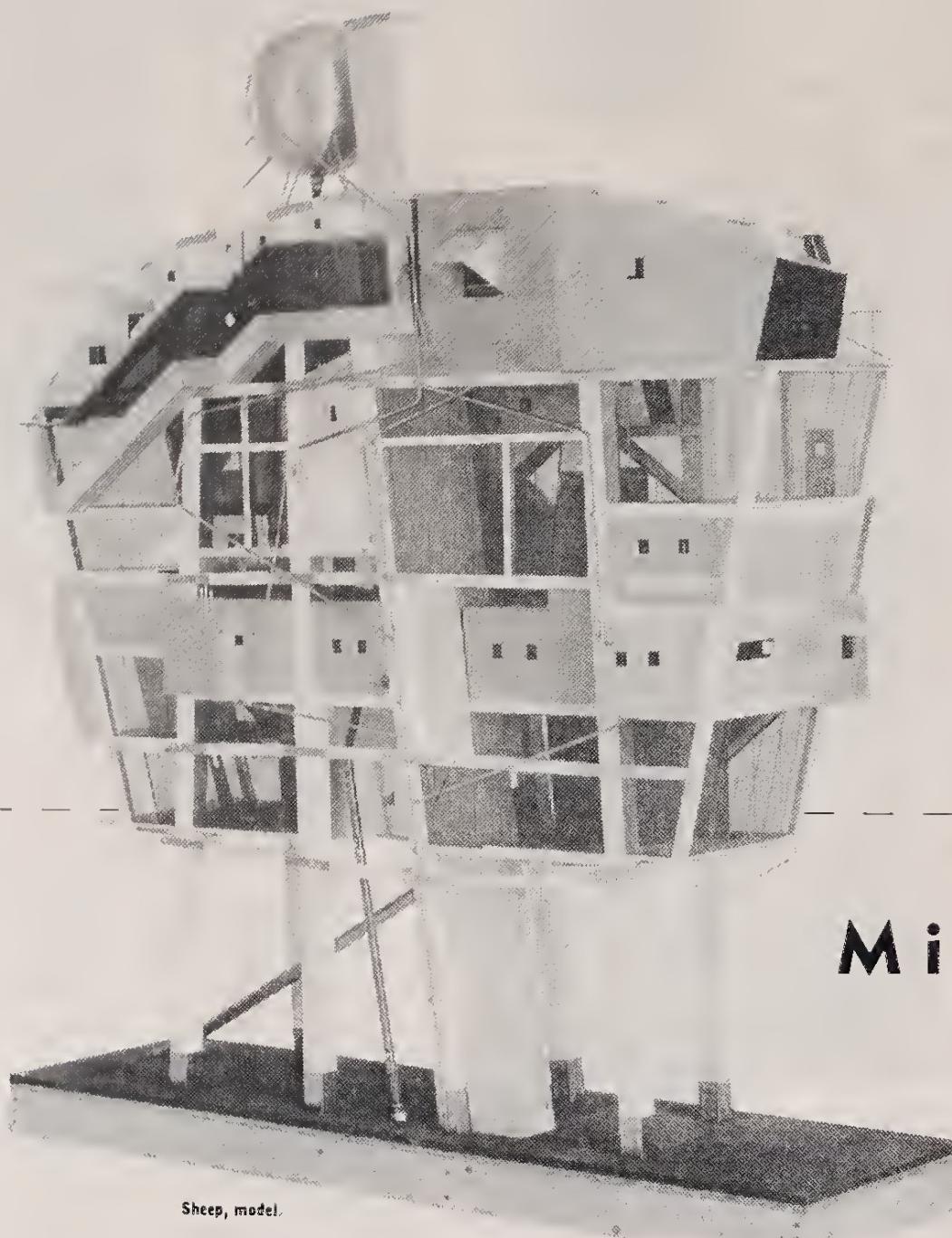
Michael

SORKIN

TE

corpses

by Graham Shane

Michael Sorkin was for many years the architectural correspondent of the *Village Voice* in New York. Writing in a popular and easily accessible style, he acted as the acerbic conscience of the architectural profession in the gilded and booming 1980s. He was perhaps the wittiest , most independent and successful commentator on this spectacular age of architectural consumption. A collection of his essays from the *Voice*, entitled *The Exquisite Corpse*, conveys a sense of his decade-long outrage at the many wasted urban and architectural opportunities in the city. Part of Sorkin's powerful appeal as a writer is his ability to personalize large issues and pinpoint key personalities or players in the New York City power game. For Sorkin the twin paragons of the New York architectural establishment, Philip Johnson (architect, power broker, and longtime arbiter of good taste at MoMA) and Paul Goldberger (the rarely critical architectural corespondent of the *New York Times*) were the chief villains of the age. In contrast to these villains, Sorkin's pantheon of personal architectural favorites were drawn from the neglected modern, organic tradition (Wright, Aalto, early Stirling and Scarpa) as well as the then out-of-fashion high-tech tradition (Bucky Fuller, Archigram, Cedric Price, Foster, Rogers and Lebbeus Woods). Sorkin dreamt of his organic and high-tech heroes triumphing over the publicity-conscious ogres of the establishment, who were ruining New York City In conjunction with rampant commercialism. In pursuit of this dream he stopped writing for the Voice in the late 1980s and attempted the difficult transition into architectural production, opening the Michael Sorkin Studio.[1]

S O R K I N

AND THE AMERICAN CITY

Much of Sorkin's writing for the *Voice* concerned the fate of New York City and its institutions, as well as the politics of the architectural culture of the period. The city was central to his concerns and was constantly at risk. His articles for the *Voice* attacked the plague of commercial hyperdevelopment that descended everywhere in New York in the 1980s. He wrote critically of both Johnson and Burgee's scheme to kill the messy vitality of 42nd Street and Goldberger's reactions in "Why Goldberger Is So Bad; The Case of Times Square" (1985). In "Tipping the Circle" (1985) he opposed the city's proposed hyperdevelopment of the Columbus Circle Convention Center site, which has since been downsized and held up in the courts. The "Dump the Trump" article of the same year lampooned the "young master builder's" ambitions for the world's tallest tower and largest shopping mall at Trump City on the West Side, now the site of Riverside South. "Ciao Manhattan" (1989) criticized the ersatz simulacra of urbanity at Battery Park City and the power of the historic preservationists, who had filled the vacuum left by the lack

of leadership in City Planning. For Sorkin the city was being turned into a theme park. Even the major cultural institutions of New York, like MoMA, the Guggenheim and the Whitney, were busy turning themselves into combination art galleries and shopping malls.[2]

In all these cases the city and its architecture was threatened by the advances of the "hyper-real," an architecture made up of the visual equivalents of sound-bites, architectural clichés related chiefly to fund-raising and public relations. Sorkin was quite clear that his chief villain, Philip Johnson, was the source of this image-making architectural disease. In "The Real Thing" (a typical Sorkin pop reference to a contemporary Coca-Cola advertisement of 1986), he wrote that "Johnson's major contribution has been in aiding the entry of 'real' architecture into the realm of what Jean Baudrillard has called the realm of 'hypereality,' a terrain in which signs of the real are everywhere substituted for the real itself, in which all ideas of authenticity and originality are eviscerated...[Johnson's great error was] the disengagement of architecture from its real sources of meaning." (*The Exquisite Corpse*, p. 173).

The invasion of the city by urban simulacra and hyper-real development packages threatened the diversity of the communal and social life in the existing city. The source of meaning in architecture for Sorkin as critic is always the poetic and the social diversity of the city, lying in the collective and the communal realm, not in manipulative image-making and commer-

cial packaging. As developers ambitions and funds grew in the 1980s the threat of the hyper-reality seemed ever more powerful, transforming the city for the convenience of the suburban, commuting middle class, leaving behind a central city polarized between the very rich and very poor. Sorkin's commentary was based upon the perception that the community of the inner city was dying in an age of massive central city investment.

This analysis and concern for the fate of the American city was explored further In Sorkin's second book, the essay collection which he edited, *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (1992). Sorkin's introduction focuses on his theme of the invasion of hyper-reality and the privatization of public space in the American city. The excellent first essay by Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," perfectly illustrates Sorkin's point. Crawford documents the substitution of the carnivalesque simulacra for the "real" main street, using the example of the gigantic post modern mall/entertainment complex at Edmonton, Canada. The last essay of the collection, by Sorkin himself, examines what has long been recognized by semiologists as the apogee of urban simulacra and hyper-space, Disneyland (with its controlled access and its lands of manipulated fantasy). Sorkin also critically examines the wider scope of "Disneyzone," the vast controlled acreage of Disney's Florida theme park, which many consider to be the best urban planning and design in America.[3]

reports

SORKIN'S MODEL CITY

The fate and future of the American city formed the basis of Sorkin's first move from successful architectural writer to designer. In the fall of 1989 he unveiled his *Model City* project in a small room at the downtown galleries of Artists Space. This was a plan for a Deconstructivist new town, which deliberately flew in the face of the canons of urban good taste which had been established in Battery Park City and Disneyland. Nothing was spelt out in detail, no zoning provisions or view corridors were defined. Instead the *Model City* presented a surprising, energetic collage of collusive spars. The theme of the Surrealist "exquisite corpse" of the essay collection title was again invoked in an accompanying text, as the motif for the composition of the city with its sudden juxtapositions of scales, colors, forms, and textures.[4]

The *Model City* was an extraordinary installation with a very strong physical presence and powerful image. In the small gallery the enormous model thrust out into

within and without (reminiscent of Hadid or Coop Himmelblau).

The *Model City* as a serious piece of urban and architectural research investigated questions concerning the city section and form not usually addressed in the Deconstructivist city. The city within the circle contained a sandwich of three zones. At the center of the sandwich lay a strip of more intense activity beside the intrusive point of the wedge. Certainly no towers or cathedrals marked this zone, but at this fulcrum of collusive forces there was an density of concentrated action not found elsewhere. Here long, upper bars of wood might well have been remains of megastructural slabs (left over from an Archigram or a Paul Rudolph scheme). The colored wedges below indicated a more fractured and folded approach of small-scale, three-dimensional volumes, generated by a different grid, lower and closer to the water (perhaps a more traditional street based city, like medieval Venice?). The *Model City* thus vertically articulated two different scaled systems of urban fragmentation in the area of its most intense activity.

The *Model City* was also a media provocation, a counter-pro-


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EXPLORING THE MODEL CITY: THREE PROJECTS

With the *Model City* Sorkin plunged into the unspoken debate over the form of the Deconstructivist City and its relationship to the old city. The question posed by the center of Sorkin's *Model City* is ultimately the relationship between the ruptured megastructure above and the city of fragments below. Sorkin asked, How it is possible to combine the unifying technological imperatives of the megastructure above with the fragmentation and decentering of collage below? Sorkin proceeded to design a set of projects (with associate Kent Hikida in the Michael Sorkin Studio) which explored this urban and architectural conundrum on a smaller scale. Again the projects are in part serious architectural research and in part media provocation commenting on the status quo. This doubling technique (and the double layering strategy of the *Model City*) can be seen at work on a small scale in the *Tracked Housing* project intended for the Trump City railway yard site. It is also present in the *Sheep* project for small megastructural fragments hovering over SoHo and in the *Beached Housing* for Jamaica, which won the Progressive Architecture citation in 1992.
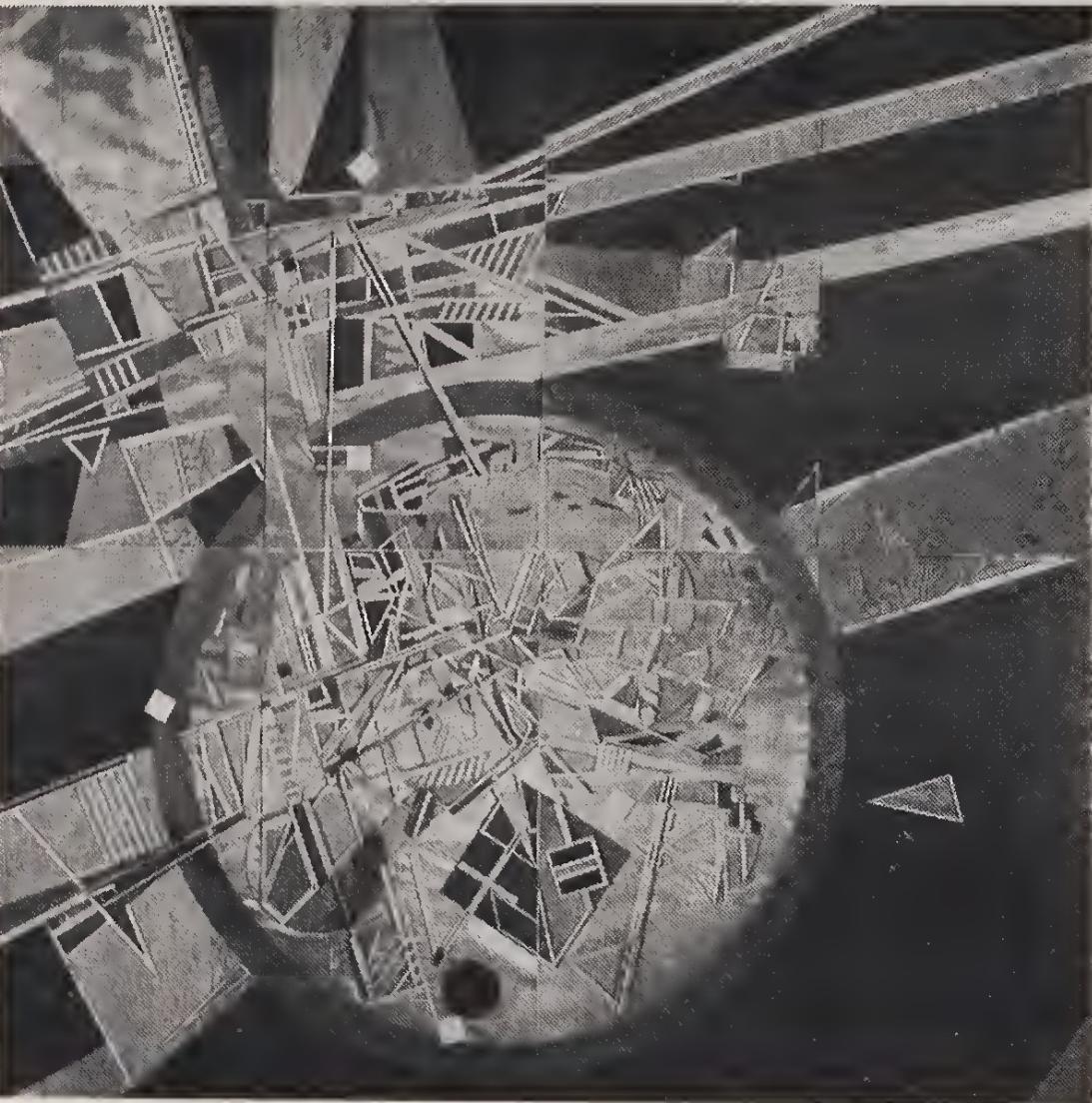
the room, close to vertical, with a large framed support structure to the rear, like an inclined roadside billboard. Coats and hats could be stored in the rear of the structure, which had an architecture and logic of its own. The surface of the model immediately dominated the space on entry. From the room entrance the surprising angle of presentation made the city read like a low, sculptural bas-relief against the steeply inclined plane. It revealed the city as an image seen from above, from the viewpoint of a pilot. The plan consisted of a simple basic geometry overlaid by many fragmented layers. The *Model City* was built over a circular, silver lagoon, referring to the ideal urban typology of the Renaissance. This unifying symbolic form was broken at one point by an equally symbolic form, a Constructivist wedge of silver (also water). The silver wedge punctured the perfection of the circle, unleashing a set of forces

posal and installation piece. There was no client or builder waiting in the wings. As a media provocation it commented on the existing conventions of the urban simulacra which Sorkin saw destroying the American city. The *Model City* may be seen, for example, as a direct critique of commercial urbanism, such as Johnson and Burgee's towers at 42nd Street. In the *Model City* there are no street lines, street walls and set backs, no ersatz urban theme parks or areas of historic preservation. This is a brave new world of Blade Runner and the hard realism of science fiction, dysfunctional, hyper-modern cities. The *Model City* tried to break the obvious codes of urban design and harness the forces presumed to be at work in a dynamic futurist city. Like other Deconstructivist cities it reversed the hierarchies and codes of the post-modern city in an exhilarating and experimental "what if?" scenario.[5]

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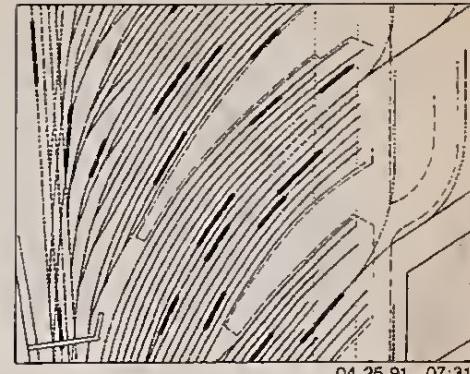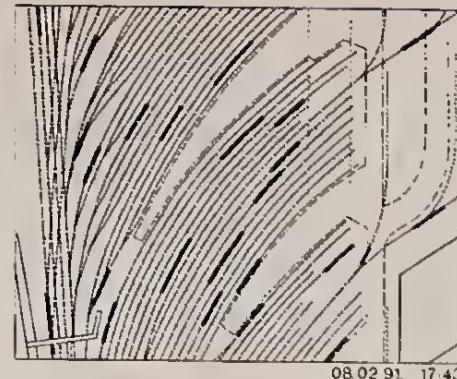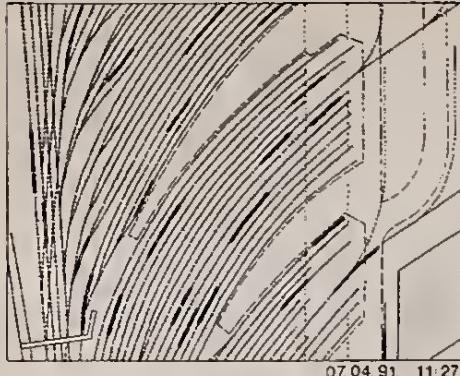
HE TRACKED HOUSING _ _

The *Tracked Housing*, like the *Model City*, reads as a critique of contemporary urbanism. Sorkin's project challenges the conventional pieties and urban simulacra of the current Riverside South development, with its streets, row houses, and large skyscraper towers modeled on pre-war prototypes. For the same site Sorkin proposed the shocking image of small mobile housing units on the old Penn Yard tracks (reinstalled following the plan of the original rail yard). The mobility of these elements links to Sorkin's high-tech heroes, like Cedric Price's *Potteries Think Belt* project from the 1960s. In that project a mobile university was placed in railway cars and moved about a decaying industrial region of England to retrain the population. In Sorkin's project the cars operate on the moribund and decaying infrastructure of the mammoth American railway system, abandoned and disused. The project imaginatively recycles this system to provide urgently needed housing.

The project, as pure architectural and urban research, continues Sorkin's investigation of the themes of typology and vertical layering. The name of the project refers to tract housing, the standard form of American suburban homes on small lots or tracts of land. These tract houses were produced in huge numbers after the Second World War to create the American suburb. Sorkin refers both to this housing typology and the lower-cost typology of the mobile home, long the preoccupation of Rudolph, one of his heroes. The housing would be provided temporarily in disused, antique railway cars, which can be moved to the site. The cars can be seen as mass-produced elements, small fragments in a larger system of a megastructural composition, like the spars of the *Model City*.[6]

The theme of vertical layering is pursued in a second system of small-scale fragmentation which takes over once the tracked housing arrives on site, converting the cars with additions that compromise their mobility. The tower additions thus propose another version of the double layering of the utopian *Model City*, but a version which can be applied at a small scale in the existing city. The relationship between the two strata of the city in *Tracked Housing* has been developed, harmonized, and considerably refined. The junction between tower and train is clear. Towers ride on trains, which form their base or datum. While

the trains are metallic, the towers are white and appear to be built of adobe or some organic material. These white towers are transformed by clip-on elements. A kit of parts, smaller scale elements like balconies, skylights, escape stairs, and rooftop cabins, is employed to humanize and imply habitation. These small-scale elements (reminiscent of Frank Gehry's small buildings and private houses) include fanlike rooftop extensions, poetic elements which would be illuminated at night and seen from the highway above and on the city skyline.

The image of a city made up of old railway cars and small tower additions is so far from the mainstream of architectural production that its value has again to be seen as educational and critical media intervention. Clearly such cars could be built and inhabited given vast changes in the system of land development, land valuation, and organization of society. Disconnecting a house from the land underneath it is a radical proposition, which has produced many legal problems for the owners of American mobile homes. Where is the inhabitant of such a mobile home legally resident, given the ability to move? Where are such residences to be taxed? The permanence of the city, its institutions and its built form is brought into question by the potential transience of the Sorkin's *Tracked Housing*. The city is thus transformed into a shifting mass of capsules, a new reality radically at odds with the stasis of the proposed hyper-development of simulated urbanism about to be installed on the site. While the Sorkin project acts a media intervention and provocative critique, its dynamic flexibility and impermanence questions fundamental aspects of our normative conceptions of the city.
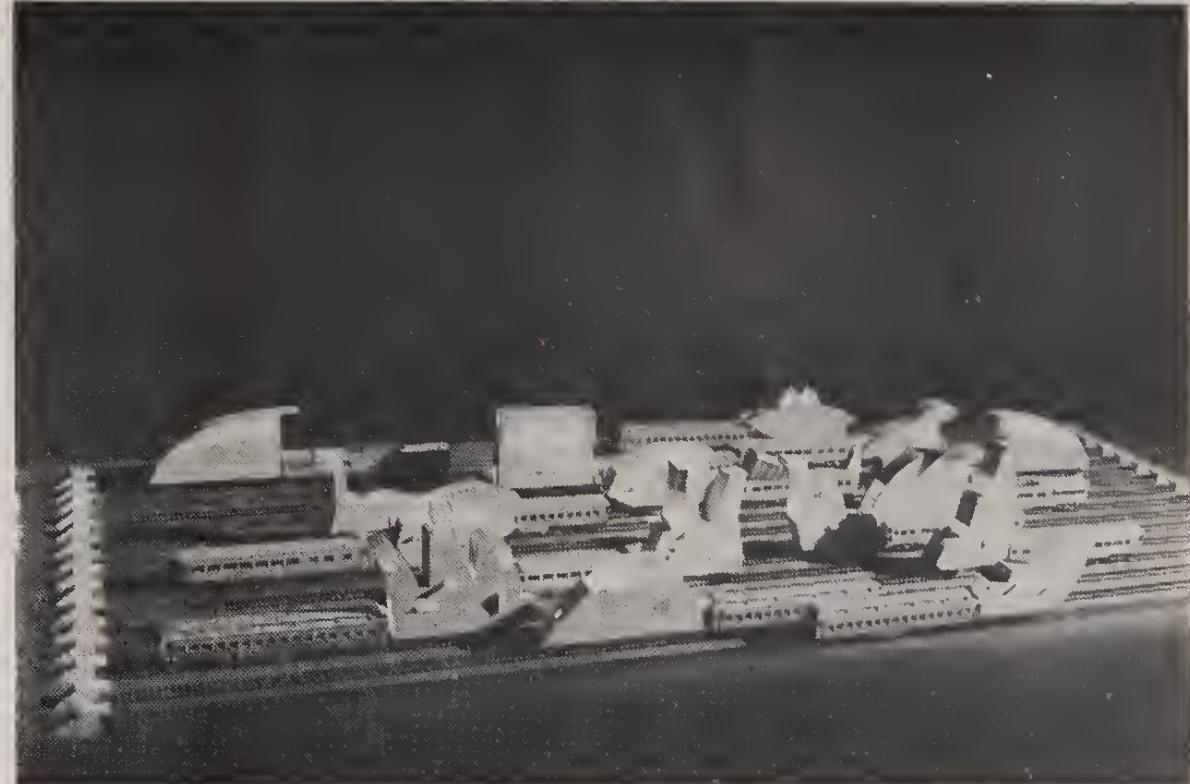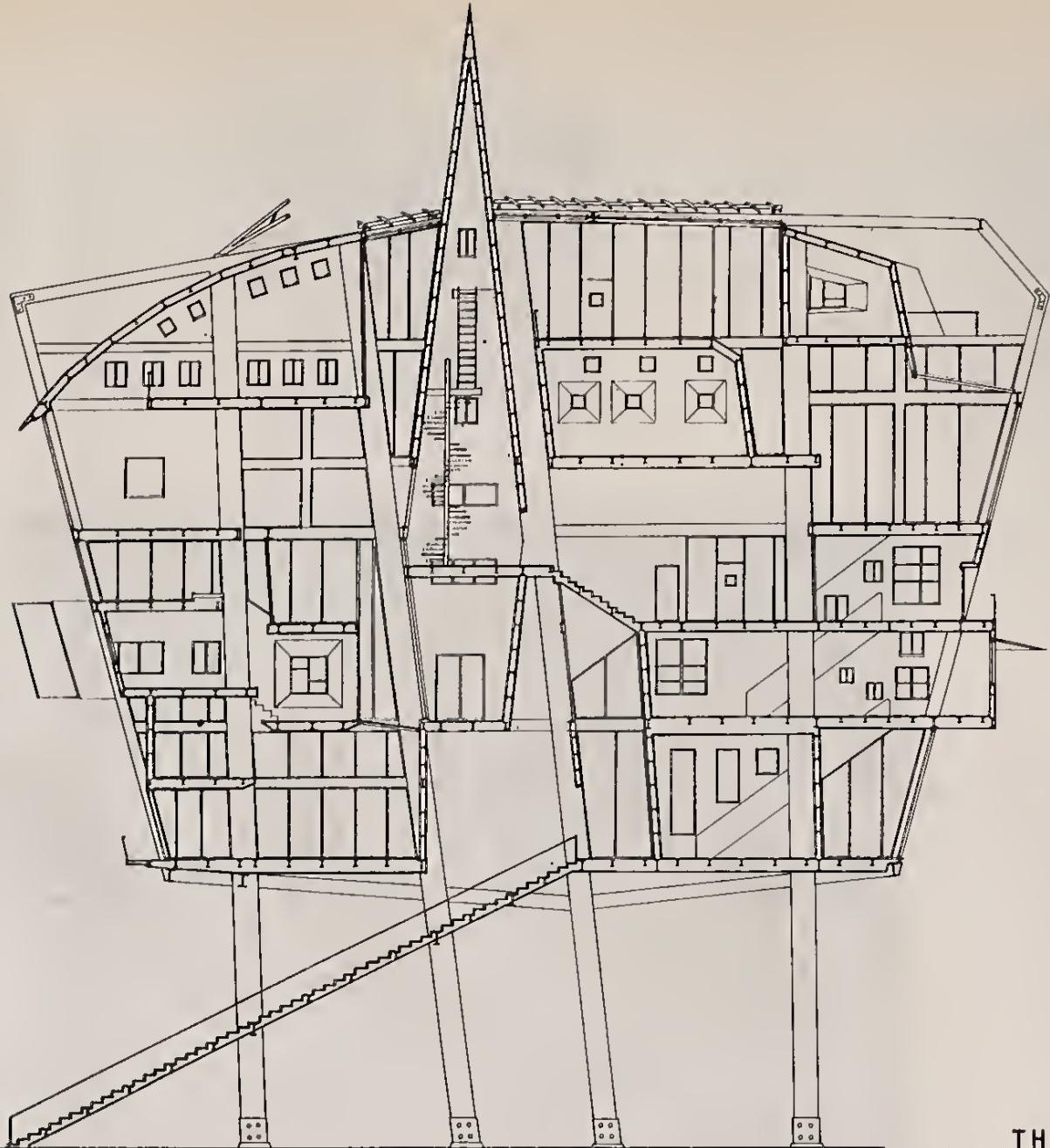
Sheep, section.

THE SHEEP

Sorkin's research into the vertical layering of cities continued in his *Sheep* project, for a loft building to be built over a part of the historic SoHo district in New York. The project must again be seen as

Archigram "Walking City"

part architectural and urban proposition, part media provocation, no developer or builder is waiting in the wings. The building is a small fragment in a potentially larger megastructural system floating over the city. Like Archigram's idea of "Walking Cities" (developed by Ron Herron and shown by him stationed off Manhattan in the East River) these *Sheep* might also be mobile on their spindly legs. The *Sheep* stands over the historic loft and gallery buildings which normally have regular, often classical, cast-iron facades and fit cozily into the Soho street grid. These 19th century buildings now form an urban preservation area in which uses and conversions are strictly controlled. As a group the buildings form a 5 to 6-story carpet of blocks whose rooftops are a uniform height creating a platform or datum, which bristles with elevator shafts and water tanks on the city skyline. The entire neighborhood is now part of the "valley" of lower-scale development caught between the clusters of 30 to 50-story towers of Wall Street to the south and Midtown to the north.[7]

Like its predecessor, the *Sheep* acts as both architectural proposition and critical urban question, aimed at the profession via the media. The architectural proposition concerns the historic loft building type which has a simple rectangular plan, uninterrupted, clear span floors and clear circulation shafts or zones, all sandwiched between two cross-walls on the 20x100-foot lot boundary. Five convoluted duplex and triplex loft housing/studio workplace units inhabit the *Sheep*'s elevated body. The *Sheep* has the long, thin, boxy form of the typical loft building, but is raised up on pilotis. It is full of random juxtapositions and surprises, reminiscent of a gothic castle or Gaudi's Palazzo Guel in Barcelona.[8]

Like that of the *Tracked Housing*, the image of the *Sheep* is far from the mainstream norm and could only be built given major changes in the building codes and land values of New York City. Hovering on its pilotis above the street, the building assaults the sensibilities of the historical preservationists. It deliberately retained the messy, dynamic, and unsightly conditions of a Canal Street parking lot (serving the cars and trucks noisily rushing between bridge and tunnel, spewing out pollution). The open lot has long been used for parking in the week and a flea market on Sundays. Sorkin keeps this gritty reality as part of the setting for his *Sheep*, borrowing from the street to give his building an aura of authenticity. The character of the wrecked street architecture of the existing automotive forecourt is largely left untouched. This "dirty realism" is categorically opposed to the smooth urban simulacra of Riverside South and the urban clean-up campaign proposed at Times Square.[9]

The *Sheep* building makes clear Sorkin's urban ideal of double layering the city, producing increased density with minimum intrusion. Through his careful insertion of the *Sheep* in the abandoned crevices of the city, Sorkin attempts to creatively reuse the urban waste space created by the automobile (serving the suburbs). He dreams of a reinvigorated city which is still flexible and able to engage the car-based culture. At the same time he points, as at the Penn Yards, to alternative uses for the unseen and uncared for waste spaces of the city. The site's multiple use potential includes the vitality of the market, the utility of parking, as well as a small contribution to the solution of the housing problem. The building in addition has its large scale picturesque elements which are meant to be seen from afar, like the pyramid apartment and the spherical water tank on its rooftop. These two elements address the neighborhood skyline and the southern approach from Church Street. The building thus proposes an intermediary scale between street and skyscraper. Like the rooftop towers of the *Tracked Housing*, the *Sheep* is highly articulated and sym-

Sheep on Canal Street.

Sheep in Hamburg.

bolic in the public and communal realm of the city skyline. The city skyline is treated as datum on which to operate. The scheme as media provocation thus attempts to project an alternative communal counter-image on the skyline of the post-modern city, previously controlled exclusively by corporate towers.

reports

THE "FISH" HOUSES

If the *Tracked Housing* engages our normative image of a static city and the *Sheep* attacks our notions of an historic district, the small holiday village of *Fish* or *Beached Houses* appears at first sight to be removed from the issues of the vertical layering of the city, historic building types and the transformation of the image of the city through a manipulation of the city skyline. Yet many of the same themes may be found in this encampment of fossil-like structures on the shoreline. The relationship of the houses to the ground plane of the beach continues themes from the vertical layering of the city. The project questions our assumptions about a holiday home and vacation leisure time, in an age of mass travel to corporate-owned holiday zones full of simulacra, such as Disneyland. The public symbolism of the *Fish* engages in a critique of such simulacra, while proposing a more gritty and less cheery alternative. The project is again part serious architectural research and part playful media provocation.

The architectural and urban proposition of the *Fish* concerns the theme of vertical layering found in Sorkin's earlier urban work. Each of the *Beached House* types explores different junction conditions between the housing unit and the ground plane, a continuation of research from the *Model City* and *Sheep* building on its pilotis. The first house type, the "Carp," like the *Sheep*, is raised on spindly legs and has small viewing pods projecting from its surface. Entry is again via a ramp into its belly. The second house type, the "Ray" type, is positioned at grade on the ground plane of the beach, it is a circular, untransformed piece of zoomorphic perfection. It is a variation of the *Tracked House* railway cars which were also set at grade, but this time it is horizontally extended with a circular skirt of decks. The third house type, the "Slug," engages the ground plane of the village and is half-buried underground. It also suggests another variation of the railway cars, this time jammed into the sand. Elements from the *Sheep* are present in all three house types, in the convoluted interior planning, in the gestural, exaggerated perforations and orifices in the wall, as well as in the symbolic roof profiles. The "Carp" in particular, on its legs, looks like some abandoned piece of World War II machinery, perhaps the wreck of a Stratofortress (reminiscent of Lebbeus Woods) crashed on the sand and elevated on sticks by the natives as a deity.

The *Fish* must be seen, like the earlier research, in relation to unstated normative architectural typologies, just like the tract homes or the standard loft buildings earlier. The *Fish* attack the modernist conception of a vacation home as a beach house perched out on the dunes, with extensive decks commanding panoramic views of the coast. This normative typology is perhaps best epitomized by the cubist Long Island houses of the New York Five, especially Gwathmey-Segal or Richard Meier from the 1960s. In contrast to the expansive openness of these beach houses, Sorkin's three *Beached House* types, like the *Sheep*, have cavernous and complex interior realms, with relatively modest openings to the outside. All three houses work in relation to the datum of the beach surface, demonstrating a variety of architectural, alternative positions relative to the normative and dominant horizontal stance of the standard modernist beach house. The positions of the six *Fish* houses relative to the datum of the beach imply a double layering of buildings above and below the beach surface, like the rooftop symbolism of the *Sheep* relative to the datum of SoHo lofts or the towers on top of the railway cars. All three *Fish* are in addition covered by a silver, metallic skin, riveted to their ribs and skeletons, smooth and shiny, turning the sand into the sea, as the *Fish* cavort like a pack of dynamic Dolphins. Their baroque dynamism again contrasts with the stasis of the sleek white boxes of the modernist model.

This image of the village of six *Fish* houses scattered on the beach like six crashed Stratofortresses is far from the mainstream image of the vacation home. They clearly would be expensive and difficult to build, probably provoking protests from the neighbors. The wrecked and abandoned, vaguely military imagery of the *Fish* addresses Sorkin's theme of media provocation. Sorkin here attacks the idea of the idyllic holiday home in an age of mass tourism. Millions travel voluntarily to well-advertised and packaged "fantasy" vacations in the hyper-space of Epcot and the other Disney parks. Sorkin's gritty, war-torn image of the crashed Stratofortresses offers a commentary on the manipulative engineering of pleasure achieved by Disney. Sorkin proposes as an alternative a joyful, largely interior pleasure dome in the ruins of the military-industrial complex represented by the Stratofortress. The problem is that these *Fish* must enter the realm of hyper-space in order to activate their criticism, like all media provocation. The smooth surfaces and baroque forms of the *Fish* sail perilously close to the decorated sheds and "ducks" of the simulacra of Disneyworld, their subversive message drowned in the media fanfare. The highly successful *Fish* thus raise questions about the limits of media provocation, while continuing the debate over the disruptive impact of the simulacra.[10]

The success of the *Fish* houses in the recent *Progressive Architecture* marks Sorkin's transition from writer to designer in New York. The irony of the success of his most image-conscious and Disneyesque project in the mainline media, the prime purveyor of the architectural and urban simulacra, cannot have escaped Sorkin. The balance between architectural inquiry and media provocation undoubtedly shifted in the *Fish* project towards the media end of the spectrum. The absence of the city was perhaps critical in that shift. The *P.A.* Jurors were predictably divided, given Sorkin's double strategies. It is true that the double programs of Sorkin's work can produce conflicts. There are obvious problems around junctions with the old city and internal organization, but given the parallel goals of architectural research and media provocation such inconsistencies are to be expected. Sorkin's work has both a wonderful fictional quality and a detailed grittiness, which usually enables it to maintain a critical social edge against hyper-reality so harshly criticized elsewhere. There can be no doubt about the Sorkin Studio's commitment to the messy life of the real city, while the simulacra aim at a blandness and the commercial exploitation of the market. Sorkin's projects are gritty, disturbing, "useless" poetry.[11]

Sorkin has carried over many themes from his writing into his designs work. His desired transition to designer in the face of a massive recession raises many questions. (Many architects are leaving the field.) The role of the architect in this period is particularly frustrating. Little is getting built, the profession is shrinking, and the percentage of built work in architects' hands is diminishing. While his wish to build is commendable, it is sad that Sorkin has chosen in his process of transition to silence his written, critical voice. This voice so wittily and brilliantly inspired so many amidst the crass commercialism of the 1980s. The loss of this voice in a difficult period is a major blow for the architectural culture of New York. The profession faces a major problem of how to operate responsibly in a mediated realm, in which built architecture is just one form of space inhabited by citizens in the mediated city. Sorkin's projects explore this novel situation in many exemplary ways, but it is still a great pity that we have lost his critical and acerbic voice.

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1 The literary reference of the collection's title is to the famous poem written by Louis Aragon and his friends, who each wrote one word on a sheet of paper, folded the paper, and passed it on to their neighbor. The resulting poem was a work of the group's collective unconscious, produced through a group form of automatic writing; no one person was in control. Sorkin's own writings, drawings, and career appear full of such delightful juxtapositions, as he picks over ruined corpses of modernism, post-modernism and the Deconstructivist culture of New York city.

2. The Museum of Modern Art employed Cesar Pelli, architect of many malls, to transform its early modern building into a mall-like structure, complete with escalators and glass sheathing to the garden court. The Whitney planned to desecrate Marcel Breuer's modern design with what was, in Sorkin's view, a Michael Graves post-modern monster. The Guggenheim went ahead with an expansion at the back of Wright's masterpiece despite the critic's entreaties and the opposition of many other interested parties, the community, and neighbors.

3. Other contributors to *Variations* range from the Los Angeles urban geographer Ed Soja to Mike Davis, a critic of the prisonlike nature of post-modern urban space in L.A. Christine Boyer's "Cities for Sale: the Merchandising History of South Street Seaport" deals with the creation of a historic mall-like enclave in a decaying downtown district of New York. Trevor Boddy examines the above and below grade "Analogues City" created by self-contained urban enclaves and their connections.

4. Sorkin's architecture and urbanism during the previous years of critical writing had loosely drawn on his favorite organic and mechanistic masters, slowly transforming from a modernistic, streamlined Rationalism (an urban design project in Arizona) into a more idiosyncratic and technically oriented preoccupation with poetic objects in urban space (entries for the Pershing Square Competition and the West Hollywood Civic Center Competition, both in L.A.) Ref. DBR

5. The question of double/multiple layering of the city with alternative codes has been raised before by Studio Asymptote (Rashid, Couture and Weinstein), West Coast Gateway Competition in Los Angeles, Daniel Liebskin's proposed I.B.A. Housing slab in Berlin, and even in Zaha Hadid's Peak Project for Hong Kong from 10 years ago.

6. Ref. Weiss Community Builders and Willis Wheel Estate White Tower Jackson Crabgrass Frontier.

7. Ref. Lotus loft building issue.

8. The 5 units are wrapped in its tangled intestines, forming an interlocking web of duplex and triplex vertical configurations, all serviced by a labyrinth of crossover stairs. The elevator core moves diagonally through the building and is positioned to plug into the slot of communal space as it moves between the units. The north side of the building is zoned with bathrooms and the elevator, the south side is zoned as living spaces, public spaces, and stairs. Two large-scale geometric forms stand out clearly superimposed on the body of the *Sheep*'s south facade. One is a spherical water tank at rooftop level which ddresses the skyline of the city. The other is a pyramidal form which contains a triplex apartment, whose peak registers at the rooftop level beside the sphere. The building is reduced at grade to eight structural columns, an elevator core (with perhaps a fire stair inside?), a sewage line, water mains and ramped pedestrian entrance.

9. Liane Lefevre dirty realism, ref. DBR.

10. The *Fish* serve as a reminder that such pleasure is based on masking the military might of potential mass destruction and the terror inspired by the local wars of the post-modern world (another reality also seen nightly on television inbetween the advertisements). Disney theme parks contain similar silver reminders of the military-industrial complex in the miniature (atomic?) submarines of the Jules Vernes Nautilus undersea world, ref. A.D., issue Disneyland.

11. Jurors were split between an appreciation of its Dada, "shock" quality and the detractors sense of its "lack of discipline" (and even unbuildability), ref. PA article.

GORDON MATTA-CLARK:

by Frederieke S. Taylor

Architecture AS ALCHEMY

Gordon Matta-Clark is widely known as an architectural "Deconstructivist" who created spaces by slicing and cutting existing structures. His environmental installations were not just formal gestures, they were also part of a general questioning of society. Less well-known is that Matta-Clark, like his artistic fore-father Duchamp, had an abiding interest in alchemy. Trained as an architect at Cornell University, Matta-Clark studied occult science and alchemy later on his own. He acquired an impressive knowledge of alchemical iconography and ideas which would have a large influence on his work.

Duchamp was notoriously secretive about his studies in alchemy and took great pains to hide his sources. Due to his widow Jane Crawford, who preserved his library, Matta-Clark's sources can still be traced.[1] The range of Gordon Matta-Clark's alchemical library is impressive—it includes books such as A.E. Waite's *The Secret Tradition*; Titus Burckhard's *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*; Mark Graubard's *Astrology and Alchemy, Two Fossil Sciences*; K.K. Daberer's *The Goldmakers; 10,000 Years of Alchemy*; and John Horgrave, Paracelsus, and Basilius Valentinus's, *The Triumphal Chariot of Antinomy*. Judging from the labels in the books, Matta-Clark made many buying trips to the Samuel Weiser Bookstore, specialists in books on the occult, then located at 845 Broadway near Astor Place. Judging from the marks in the books, he used them frequently, underlining relevant passages and making notes in the margins.

Much of Matta-Clark's earlier work involved acts of cooking, brewing and (al)chemical experimentation. Examples of this are *Photo-Fry* (1969), where he fried photographs in a pan of grease, *Agar* (1969–70), where he cooked agar (a material made from seaweed) with water, food material; and debris found in the street, and *Incendiary Wafers* (1970–71).[2] In addition to a studio filled with cooking equipment, Matta-Clark set up an alchemical laboratory in the early 1970s. The laboratory is now stored in a barn in New Hampshire.

Matta-Clark's contemporaries and fellow artists were keenly aware of his interest in alchemy. Alice Aycock remembered him "making art as if he was in a laboratory,....the stewing chemicals, the molds on the floor in some kind of pans like laboratory tests."[3] Writer and critic Klaus Kertess recalled that "Gordon had a chemical garden in his studio, and was making alchemical references as art metaphors."[4] In 1972, in an article published in *Art in America*, art critic Cindy Nemser called Matta-Clark an alchemist and referred to the alchemical nature of his work.[5]

In 1971, Matta-Clark started FOOD Restaurant with a few friends in SoHo. A small fragment cut out of the wall of the restaurant illustrates the convergence of Matta-Clark's interests in alchemy and architecture, with both disciplines leading to material transformation. Written in pencil on the surface of the wall fragment are words that appear to be a formula or recipe. Caroline Yorke Goodden related its history: "While we were putting FOOD together, there was a piece of wall that had to come out. Gordon decided to cut himself a wall sandwich: he cut a horizontal section through the wall and the door and fell in love with it. And so the cutting pieces began."[6] For Gordon Matta-Clark alchemy and architecture were closely connected, with an easy exchange between two seemingly so disparate systems.

notes

1. I am indebted to Jane Crawford for pointing out the existence and showing Gordon's library to me.

2. Mary Jane Jacob. *Gordon Matta-Clark: A Retrospective* (Chicago, 1985).

3. Jacob, 33.

4. Jacob, 27.

5. Cindy Nemser, "The Alchemist and the Phenomenologist," *Art in America* 59, 2 (Mar.-Apr. 1971), p. 100-103.

6. I included this fragment in the exhibition "The Fifth Essence: On Alchemy" at the Gracie Mansion Gallery, Spring 1990.

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